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Rembrandt's pictures and his life : the Leiden years

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REMBRANDT'S PICTURES AND HIS LIFE: THE LEIDEN YEARS

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ABSTRACT

REMBRANDT'S PICTURES AND HIS LIFE: THE LEIDEN YEARS

by Nancy M. Samelson

Why do Rembrandt's pictures move us so deeply? Since Rembrandt believed that Nature should be his only guide, he therefore concluded that in order to move others he should infuse his works with his own emotions. He did this by picturing well-known biblical, mythological, and historical subjects that symbolically related to his feelings.

Personal themes from his earliest pictures include his strong consciousness of himself as an artist and his changing reactions to living at home. Next works arise from life in his studio, relations with his first apprentice and concern about his father's health and about supporting himself. During his last Leiden years he gained commissions for portraits in Amsterdam. Amsterdam brought new themes: affluence and love.

For Rembrandt the process of picturing-making and his later consideration of a picture created new emotions and ideas. Thus he often transcended his initiating negative feelings.

This approach to Rembrandt's pictures offers important insights into his creative process and should be applied to the rest of his life.

To Hans

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A few paragraphs can only begin to express my gratitude to my family, and the many friends, teachers, and colleagues who have helped to bring this endeavor to this point.

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And both first and last my family: husband Hans, daughter Amy, and sons Roger and Peter have believed that my many years of research and manuscript revisions would finally begin to reach print.

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INTRODUCTION

This study began long ago when I became aware of how deeply Rembrandt's paintings moved me. I was amazed that pictures painted in Holland in the seventeenth century could communicate so much to me, an American in the twentieth century. The question that began to form in my mind was this: Through what process did Rembrandt create on panels, canvases, and paper images that affect us so strongly?

The evocative quality of his works was already evident to Rembrandt's contemporaries, as the three known appreciations of particular paintings published in his lifetime demonstrate. Philip Angel in an address to his fellow artists published in 1642, *In Praise of the Art of Painting,* singles out Rembrandt's *Samson's Wedding.* Angel praised the way Rembrandt showed the wedding guests reclining at the banquet as was the custom in ancient times, emphasized Samson's long hair so that the viewer could recognize this particular wedding, and depicted the fingers of Samson's hands in a way that makes clear he is telling a riddle. Angel concluded his commentary on *Samson's Wedding* with "this is a fruit of a most natural and well-trained understanding, and intelligent reflection on its meaning."[1]

Rembrandt's friend, Jeremias de Decker, in a poem "On the Representation of *The Risen Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen* "

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[1] Walter L. Strauss and Marion van der Meulen *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York: Abaris Books, 1979) 209, 1641/5.

published in 1660 wrote:

> When I read the Gospel, as told by Saint John,
> And together with it see this artistic scene,
> Where (I think to myself) did the brush ever
> come so close to the pen, in bringing inanimate
> color to life.
> It seems as if Christ is saying: Mary, don't tremble,
> It is I; Death has no part of your Lord,
> She, believing this, but not being totally convinced,
> Seems to vacillate between joy and tension,
> And between fear and hope . . . . [2]

De Decker was especially aware of the subtlety of Rembrandt's characterization of Mary's feelings in a biblical scene that he obviously knew very well.

The third early commentary is on Rembrandt's *Conspiracy of Julius Civilis* published in a guidebook of "the widely celebrated city of Amsterdam" in 1662. Evidently, when the author, Melchior Fokkens, saw *Conspiracy of Julius Civilis* in its original place in the Amsterdam City Hall, he immediately recalled Tacitus's description of the Batavian conspiracy against the Romans on which Rembrandt had based his painting. Then Fokkens vividly imagined the whole story, weaving prominent elements of Rembrandt's painting into his narrative.[3] Fokkens thus gave his readers an animated verbal account to accompany the great historical event that they would see reenacted before their eyes when they walked into the vast chamber of the Amsterdam City Hall.

Angel, De Decker, and Fokkens appreciated Rembrandt's vivid

[2] Ibid. 470-473, 1660/25.

[3] Ibid. 516-519, 1662/15.

and appropriate depictions of well-known biblical and historical events that were already vital elements of their inner lives through their reading.

Descriptions of particular Rembrandt paintings by three twentieth-century art historians show that they too are interpreting and understanding the feelings of the individuals whom Rembrandt portrays, even though they are not as interested in the biblical or literary sources as the seventeenth century commentators were. Otto Benesch, for example, concludes his description of *Tobit and Anna* :

> Over and above these tokens of his precocious technical mastery, however, stands his deep sense of humanity; how moving is the helpless grief of the blind old man, how impressive Hannah's indignation at her husband's doubts as to her honesty![4]

Pieter J. J. van Thiel's catalogue entry on *Belshazzar's Feast* begins:

> The depiction of moments of intense emotion . . . . fascinated Rembrandt from the very start of his career, as can be seen from *Tobit and Anna*. . . . . and he now brings it to a high pitch of refinement with this scene of the terror-stricken Belshazzar.[5]

Jakob Rosenberg, in his discussion of *The Blinding of Samson* emphasizes Rembrandt's characterization of Delilah:

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[4] Otto Benesch, *Rembrandt* (Lausanne: Skira, 1957) 28.

[5] Pieter van Thiel, *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop*, vol.1 (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1991) 184.

> Grasping Samson's shorn locks in one hand, the shears in the other, she glances back at the victim with an expression of mingled triumph and horror. In its masterly delineation of the heroine's feelings this figure recalls Shakespeare's most vivid and crisp passages[6]

Both in his time and ours, then, viewers have emphasized Rembrandt's ability to convey feeling through his works. What was it about his pictures that made this happen again and again? How did his work keep eliciting emotions in people over such a long period of history? Since such inner reactions have occurred time and time again to different people, Rembrandt must have infused data within his pictures that produced these subtle but deeply-meaningful internal responses. But how did he do it?

With this question in the back of my mind, I viewed and reviewed his works, read widely on what had been written about them, and considered the documentary material. The pages to follow present what I have learned about the first period of his productive life, the Leiden years. Through my many years of research I gradually came to realize that Rembrandt had developed his own way of solving a problem that has long puzzled orators and artists: How does one move others deeply?

Quintillian, the Roman rhetorician, said that to render passions truly the orator "must be moved with them as if they were true rather than imagined."[7] My study of Rembrandt made me realize that for him rendering emotions *as if they were true* was still not

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[6] Jacob Rosenberg, *Rembrandt: Life and Work,* 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 1964; reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) 192.

[7] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 161, 1639/2.

following Nature closely enough.

Rembrandt took seriously an approach to art that was out of favor among what might be called the European art establishment of the seventeenth century, i.e the Italian masters of painting, the masters from other countries who had studied in Italy and returned home to teach, and the connoisseurs of art, those international arbiters of artistic worth. Rembrandt's contemporary, Joachim van Sandart, a German-born artist who was trained in Rome and knew him in Amsterdam says of him in his book on artists and art, *Teutsche Academie*::

> he lacked nothing but that he had not visited Italy and other places where the Antique and the Theory of Art may be studied . . . . In consequence, he remained ever faithful to the convention adopted by him, and did not hesitate to oppose and contradict our rules of art . . . . In doing so, he alleged that one should be guided only by Nature and no other rules; [8]

Arnold Houbraken, who was an apprentice to Samuel van Hoogstraaten, one of Rembrandt's pupils, made a similar statement that Rembrandt "laid down the principle that one should only follow Nature."[9]

For the emotions to be true to Nature, Rembrandt believed that he had to experience *himself* the feelings appropriate to a particular subject. Artists before him, particularly Caravaggio, had also felt that truth to Nature was essential. Caravaggio's approach

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[8] Joachim von Sandart, *Teutsche Academie* (Nuremberg: 1675) quoted in Ludwig Goldscheider, *Rembrandt* (London: Phaidon Press, 1960) 20.

[9] Arnold Houbraken, *De Groote Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders* (1718) quoted in Ludwig Goldscheider, *Rembrandt* (London: Phaidon Press, 1960) 28.

was both to use live models and to create situations through which he could experience the emotions that he wanted to portray. Thus he is said to have burned himself and then looked in the mirror to observe his own expression. Rembrandt, however, does not seem to have *created* emotional situations, perhaps because he felt that this method was still somewhat artificial. Instead, he seems to have relied on the feelings that events in his life produced in him. With such an underlying approach it is not surprising that he discovered quite early that a very congenial subject for him was himself. In self-portraiture his hand and eye were intimately related to his internal emotional state which would be in tune with what was happening in his life. And for portraits of others, financially a very important type of work for him, he could rely on his direct emotional reactions to his sitters.

A further step he often took was to find a traditional subject which resonated with events in his life and their related feelings. To understand how he usually created his religious, historical and mythological pictures we have to look more closely at this complex internal process. These works of his move us because he consistently chose subjects for their *symbolic* relation to events in his life that deeply affected him. The word "chose" may be inappropriate, however, because it implies a conscious action. Rembrandt's subject is more likely to have resulted from the resonance between a deeply felt life experience and a scene from his great storehouse of biblical, historical and mythological stories, often combined with their pictured renditions by prior artists. A great variety of biblical, historical and mythological narratives

were available in Rembrandt's mind that could be tested as a template for a particular emotional experience in his life. From the many remembered narratives he would find the most appropriate one. Internally his real-life emotions and the events that created them would merge with a particular biblical, historical or mythological incident. From this combination a picture would grow. In the course of the first seven years of his productive life we shall look at a number of pictures enlivened through this approach.

One important area of picture-making, however, posed a difficult problem: commissions for pictures of particular subjects. Rembrandt's only known comment about his creative process concerns this difficulty. It occurs in one of his six known letters, an apology for his long delay in completing two commissioned religious paintings for Prince Frederick Hendrick of Orange, the Stadtholder of the United Provinces of the Netherlands. In a letter to Constantijn Huygens, the private secretary of the Prince, he wrote:

> My [dear] Sir:
> Because of the great pleasure [I have had] and interest I have taken in the proper execution of the two pieces His Highness has commissioned me to do, i.e. the one of Christ's Entombment, and the other his Resurrection--to the great consternation of His guard--and as a result of my diligent zeal, these two pieces have now been completed as well, and therefore I am now ready to deliver them and thus afford pleasure to His Highness, for in these two pictures the deepest and most lifelike emotion has been observed [and rendered]. That is also the main reason they have been so long in my hands.[10]

[10] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 164, 1639/2.

These two pictures had indeed been in his hands a long time. Three years earlier in another letter to Huygens, he wrote that these same pictures were "more than half-finished"[11]

As we see from this letter, Rembrandt considered that he must observe "the deepest and most life-like emotion" for his pictures to be "properly executed." Since "the deepest and most life-like emotion" that one can observe is likely to be one's own inner feelings, a commissioned painting of a specific subject might involve a long delay. Since Rembrandt evidently considered that the effectiveness of his pictures depended upon the integration of his own feelings within them, *he had to wait for the appropriate emotions to occur in his life that fitted the commissioned subject.* Commissions for particular subjects thus would be expected to be a minor part of his total output since Rembrandt's chosen way of ensuring the proper execution of a picture was not well suited to this approach. It seems likely that Rembrandt himself usually selected the subjects for pictures of specified religious, historical or mythological subjects.

Rembrandt's statement in his letter to Huygens gives us a start towards a general answer to our question. The creative process by which he vitalized his paintings, etchings and drawings began with his own feelings. While this process sounds vague in the abstract, it was very specific and concrete as it happened. His choice of scene in the resulting biblical, historical or mythological picture contained a resonating emotional and life-circumstance component. Thus the subjects of his pictures and his treatment of

[11] Ibid. 129, 1636/1.

them were energized by emotionally charged events in his life. This statement should *not* be construed to mean that his pictures were parts of a hidden autobiography, with the subjects only ostensible, that is, only socially acceptable vehicles for recording his personal life. Such a reading would miss the whole reason for his use of his own emotions, namely to "properly execute" his work. His strong feelings and their circumstances initiated the work and were essential to its liveliness, but they became transmuted as the picture developed. The whole evolution of his picture-making process transformed his private concerns into broadly meaningful works. In short Rembrandt developed his particular method of enlivening his works in order to make better pictures.

Yet we, living in our time, not only enjoy the pure experience of pictures, but many of us are also interested in what we can find out about the life of the person who created them. And since Rembrandt imbedded his feelings and the life circumstances that elicited them in many of his works, we can discover through analysis of his pictures much more about his personal life than was previously known. In addition, we will discover that in many cases the actual process of making a picture affected Rembrandt's subsequent feelings.

The primary focus of this study, then, is to study his pictures with two objectives in mind: 1) to discover "the deepest and most life-like emotions" which he included in each picture and the engendering personal circumstances that produced them; 2) to consider how the creative activity of making a picture took him beyond the feelings that attracted him to the subject initially.

Thus, while the original question was how he created pictures that move us, the investigation of this problem also produced insights into ways in which the evolving pictures modified his initiating emotions. In other words his picture-making changed his way of looking at the life experiences that initiated the work. It may well be that his picturing process, with its capacity for enabling him to transcend his initiating emotional state, was a major reason why he was able to remain so productive. The facet of Rembrandt that is emphasized in this study, then, is his creative process, its effects on the viewer, and on himself.

His immortality, however, like that of all extraordinary artists, has at least as many facets as the greatest diamonds. We in our time are drawn to a number of different aspects of his work and his life. A few examples must suffice. Svetlana Alpers in *Rembrandt's Enterprise* considers certain of Rembrandt's special qualities: his heavy laying on of paint, his dramatic use of models and his development of the role of the artist independent of patrons. She concluded that Rembrandt's uniqueness lay in his becoming and possibly inventing the artist as entrepreneur of the self.[12] Gary Schwartz's *Rembrandt, his life, his paintings* contributes a very detailed description of the larger social milieu in which Rembrandt lived and worked.[13] Both Schwartz and Alpers also provide a number of important insights into particular Rembrandt paintings.

Schwartz and Alpers, as well as many others, have thus added to our understanding of Rembrandt; yet probably the most influential

[12] Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1988).

[13] Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt, his life, his paintings* (Hammondsworth: Viking, 1985)

force in contemporary scholarship on Rembrandt's paintings is the Rembrandt Research Project team. This group of Dutch art historians has as its ambitious goal to establish, through consensus among the members of the team, which of the paintings attributed to Rembrandt were indeed painted by him. Their approach is chronological and involves thoroughly studying the paintings using a variety of techniques. Their continuing series of volumes on his paintings are usually referred to as the *Corpus.*[14]

Two recent major Rembrandt exhibitions have been organized as outgrowths of the work of the Rembrandt Research Project. Both of them have extensive accompanying catalogues. The first exhibition began in Berlin, then moved to Amsterdam with London as its final destination.[15] The second exhibition, titled: "Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," took place in New York City.[16]

This widespread international approval by leading Rembrandt scholars of the Rembrandt Research Team's authenticity evaluations may make us forget that the authors of the *Corpus* base their judgments of whether or not a painting is by Rembrandt primarily on

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[14] J. Bruyn, B. Haak, S.H. Levie, P.J.J. van Thiel and E. van de Wetering, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* (The Hague, Boston, London: Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project,1982-), vol. 1, 1625-31 (1982), vol. 2, 1631-34 (1986), vol. 3, 1635-42 (1989).

[15] Christopher Brown, Jan Kelch and Pieter van Thiel, *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop Paintings*, vol. I, and Holm Bevers, Peter Schatborn, & Barbara Welzel *Rembrandt The Master and His Workshop Drawings and Etchings*,vol 2.(New Haven, London: Yale UP,1991)

[16] Hubert von Sonnenberg, *Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Paintings: Problems and Issues* vol.1 and Walter Liedtke, Caroly Logan, Nadine M. Orenstein, Stephanie S. Dickey, vol. 2, *Paintings, Drawings and Prints: Art-Historical Perspectives* (New York: Abrams, 1995).

technical and stylistic grounds. As I shall point out in the chapters to come, in certain paintings other meaninful criteria yield different decisions on authenticity. Yet, while at times I disagree with the Rembrandt Research Project on the authenticy of a particular painting, I have relied heavily on their detailed analyses of individual paintings.

As we have seen from Rembrandt's letter to Huygens, he was well aware of what was necessary for his pictures to be properly executed: they must contain "the deepest and most life-like emotion." Again and again Rembrandt imparted his feelings to his works by choosing subjects that symbolized the unique complexity of his emotions together with the circumstances that gave rise to them. It is this process of encapsulating into his pictures his emotions and their context within his life that makes it possible for us to glean personal information about him, although it seems unlikely that he had autobiographical intentions. In a number of cases, however, he used his paintings, both in the underpainting and subtlely on the surface as well, to make comments to himself.

At least as important as the glimpses into his life that we will consider is the way that time and time again he was able to use the painting process itself to move beyond the feelings that initiated the picture Thus he was able to transcend them and move on rather than fixating on a limited range of emotions.

The approach will be chronological, even though the original question was inspired by late paintings. This choice permits Rembrandt's oeuvre to be studied developmentally, making possible the understanding of the subtleties of his later works through the

analysis of his earlier years. This study will describe his years in his native city, Leiden, concentrating on the first seven of the forty-five years of his productive life.

Chapter 1, "Rembrandt's Heritage and Early Years," covers the period prior to his first known picture. This information about the history of the period and the town in which he was born, the background of his family, his early years, his Latin school education, and his apprenticeships provides the context for interpreting his pictures.

The three chapters that follow consider his pictures from his Leiden years, including the years he spent in both Leiden and Amsterdam. Chapter 2, "Missionary Painter Living at Home," analyzes his earliest pictures, those dating from 1625 and 1626. Chapter 3, "Master in His Studio," discusses his pictures from the years 1627, 1628 and 1629. Chapter 4, "Leiden and Amsterdam," covers the years 1630 and 1631. The study ends with "Conclusion."

CHAPTER 1
REMBRANDT'S HERITAGE AND EARLY YEARS

Rembrandt was born in 1606 in the city of Leiden in a new country that would become the Netherlands. Earlier, when his father was still young, growing up in Leiden, King Philip of Spain had sent the Duke of Alva and a ten-thousand-man army into the Low Countries to enforce the Inquisition. Then the Count of Orange, William the Silent, and his brother raised an army of citizens to drive out the Spanish. One after the other the towns of the Low Countries became battlegrounds, as the Dutch strove to free themselves.

By 1574 Leiden lay under siege by Spanish garrisons camped in fields outside the town. To withstand the repeated Spanish attacks, the city of Leiden took over citizens' property near the walls. On June 22, 1574, Rembrandt's paternal grandmother's land was appropriated "for the purpose of digging, excavating, and enlarging the ditches and ramparts."[1] Inside the walls, women, children, old and young men, and animals were cooped up together. Their food supply dwindled; yet when the Spanish commander ordered them to surrender, they refused.

A contemporary report gives their reply:

> You heare that in our Towne are both dogges, kine and horses. And if we should in the end want these, yet hath every one of us a left arme to eate, and reserve the righte arme to beat the tyrant and the rest of you which are his

[1] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 25, 1574/1.

> bloddy ministers from our walles: but if at the last, our force shall not bee strong enough . . . . we will never. . . . give over the defense of the liberties of our countrie, choosing rather when wee are at the verie word [i.e. end] to set our Towne in fier, then that it shold [in] anyway be gainefull unto you and we become your slaves.[2]

The Leideners held out until the dikes were opened in the lowlands, and the Beggar fleet, a ragtag collection of ships and Dutch seamen, sailed in and liberated them. The lifting of the siege was the turning point of the war against the Spanish. All Dutch children know this date, October 3, 1574, and the saying: "Leiden relieved, Holland reprieved." On every third of October since then, Leideners all over the world, joined by others, celebrate the day of liberation by eating the food that the starved citizens feasted on: herring, white bread and *hutspot* (a stew of meat, potatoes, and onions).

The citizens of Leiden immediately began to rebuild their city, Rembrandt's paternal grandmother among them. On November 23, 1574, she was granted permission by the burgomasters of Leiden to erect a grain windmill on the city walls.[3]

Their heroic successful common effort created a deep sense of pride and equality among the people of Leiden. Artisans and aristocrats had stood watch together on Leiden's walls during the siege. Now when they passed each other on the cobbled streets their eyes met in mutual respect.

The Leideners' deep feeling of community was further

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[2] Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 160.

[3] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 25, 1574/2.

strengthened by a special tribute to their courage. In 1575 William the Silent, who had become the leader of their new country, chose their city as the site for the country's first university.

The university's governance reflected the democratic principles of the early period of the new nation. Representatives of the town governments and delegates to the governing body of the provinces were its policy makers and one of their key policies was to admit students without regard to their religion.[4] Soon the university was attracting internationally eminent scholars and promising students not only from the United Provinces and the southern Netherlands but also from all over Europe.

The professors chosen for the new university and the burgomasters and other officials of the city government generally shared a tolerant and liberal outlook. Having won their freedom from the Inquisition through the combined efforts of Protestants of different persuasions and many Catholics as well, the different religious groups continued peaceably to worship God in their own manner into the early part of the 1600s.

Rembrandt was not only a child of a new country, but also of an important new spiritual development in the Netherlands growing out of the Protestant Reformation. By the time he was born widespread literacy and the availability of Dutch Bibles created a new family ritual In Holland. Family members often gathered to listen to readings of the Bible and to worship in the evening and on Sunday. Together, without any priestly direction, they experienced

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[4] David W. Davies *The World of the Elseviers 1580-1712* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954) 12.

and considered the biblical heritage of faith, wisdom, poetry and insight into human life. And as difficulties arose, they turned as individuals and as families to the Bible for comfort, enlightenment and strength.[5]

Rembrandt's paintings, etchings and drawings demonstrate his deep faith in God and Christ and his wide ranging, detailed knowledge of both the Old and New Testaments. His portrayal of his mother as a prophetess and his lifelong depiction of biblical subjects suggest that his parents, particularly his mother, stoked his imagination by reading the Bible to him frequently when he was very young. He would later paint and etch her reading the Bible and would depict biblical characters from the Old and New Testatments and the Apocrypha as intimately as members of his family.

When we consider Rembrandt's total oeuvre, we find that as he himself had new experiences, he interpreted and reinterpreted the the Bible. His faith was so profound that his life again and again illustrated to him biblical truths. One of the subjects he returned to at different times in his life was "Christ at Emmaus," the story of Christ's reappearance on earth after his resurrection. Rembrandt painted this affirmation of Christ as a living presence in 1628 and twice in 1654, and he etched it in 1634 and 1654.

It was in Leiden's atmosphere of equality, religious tolerance, and deep religious faith that Rembrandt's parents, his father, a miller from a long line of millers, and his mother, the daughter of a baker, made the unusual decision to break the long-standing family

[5] Paul Zumthor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Macmillan, 1963; reprint, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 79.

tradition of educating their sons as apprentices to a master in the trades. They decided to enroll their youngest son, Rembrandt, in the Latin school in Leiden. Rembrandt's years in Latin School gave him a unique background for an artist of his time. He is the only known Dutch artist of the seventeenth century to have attended Latin school. This early broad classical training would provide him with an independent approach to the creation of art and would contribute appreciably to the wide scope of his subjects and the depth of his interpretations.

His parents, however, surely did not expect him to become an artist. They must have planned a very different future for their youngest son than was usual for his class. In that period the tradition of sons becoming apprentices, usually in the same trade or craft as their fathers, was so strong as to be virtually automatic. Apprentices started around the age of eight and usually stayed with their master for seven or more years. After their apprenticeship, they usually spent a lifetime working at the same trade or craft. The vestiges of this centuries-old system can still be found in Europe today.

A Latin school education was a world apart from the manual training of apprentices in the trades, whether for millers or for artists. The curriculum primarily focused on the classical Latin authors, secondarily on the Greek. This education prepared the sons of the nobility and the well-to-do for advanced study at the university where all teaching was conducted in Latin. After the university, they entered the upper levels of Dutch society, as ministers, doctors, lawyers, burgomasters or other professionals

who held positions of public responsiblity and trust.

Rembrandt's parents must have considered carefully their choice of a path for him so divergent from that of his father and from those of their other sons, a baker and a shoemaker who later became a miller. Their decision reveals their belief both in his unusual promise and in the equality of opportunity in Leiden at the time they enrolled their son in Latin school. They evidently already realized by the time he was about eight years old that he had the ability for some career beyond the trades.

Jan Orlers, burgomaster of Leiden, includes Rembrandt in a book of short biographies of notable Leiden citizens printed in 1641. We will discuss this biography in sections as appropriate:

> Rembrant van Rijn
> Son of Harmen Gerrits zoon van Rijn and Neeltgen Willems van Suydtbrouck, born in the city of Leiden 15 July 1606. His parents sent him to school, so that in the course of time he would learn Latin and thereafter could enter the Leiden Academy [i.e., the Unversity], and eventually, upon reaching maturity, he would with his knowledge be best able to serve and prompt the [interests of the] city and the community.[6]

Although Orlers does not tell us what career Rembrandt's parents planned for him, one possibility comes to mind. It seems likely that the deep religious feeling he would later express through his biblical paintings, etchings and drawings was already evident in his early youth. His parents may well have hoped that their youngest son after study at the Latin school and the University of Leiden would become a Dutch Protestant minister, a *predikant*.

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[6] Strauss *Rembrandt Documents*, 216, (1641/8).

Rembrandt's parents' desire for their son to attend the University of Leiden surely had a grounding in the recent heroic past of their city. Yet it may well have been based too on the economic prosperity of the Netherlands. Even as the Low Countries were still freeing themselves from the Spanish, they began to develop a commercial and colonial empire with Dutch merchant ships trading in every continent.

Rembrandt and his family were fortunate in the rector of the Latin school, Theodorus Schrevelius. A man in a trade requesting a Latin school education for his son would be unusual enough to require a careful look at the parents and the child. The interview probably took place in 1614, the year Rembrandt turned eight. The rector was evidently satisfied that Rembrandt could meet the school's high academic standards and was a suitable pupil for the school.

Orlers, in his biography of Rembrandt, follows his remarks about Rembrandt's parents plans for him with: "But he had no desire or inclination whatsoever in this direction because by nature he was moved toward the art of painting and drawing."[7]

Orlers' statement about Rembrandt's natural gift rings true. Even as a young Latin school student he must have been drawing skillfully and prolifically. But it probably took him a number of years before he was quite clear that he wanted to become an artist rather than a *predikant*. And the rector of the Latin school, Theodorus Schrevelius, may have helped him in this process.

Schrevelius, being a humanist, was more interested in the development of individuals than in training students for certain

[7] Ibid.

societal positions. He was also more artistic than the usual rector; he was an art collector and patron who composed poems in Latin for several of Hendrick Goltzius's engravings.[8] He even had his portrait painted by Frans Hals.[9]

Schrevelius' appreciation of art must have been helpful to Rembrandt as he began to express his natural gifts. One can imagine Schrevelius lending the young Rembrandt a copy of Karel van Mander's *Het Schilder-boek*, printed first in 1604, which seems to have been written with just such a boy as Rembrandt in mind. Van Mander, a Dutch artist, wrote his book in Dutch rather than Latin to reach out to youth with artistic promise. He begins his "Exhortations or Admonitions for the Young Beginning Painter" with this caution:

> O you disciples of the goddess of Immortality, pupils of genius, you here and there, who, instead of writing are so covering (literally "smearing") your papers with people, ships, and different animals, that you almost leave no free space, Nature wants to draw you forward to become a painter.[10]

Considering Rembrandt's later prodigious output of drawings, as a schoolboy he must already have been "smearing" his papers with sketches. *Het Schilder-boek* also speaks directly to those youths like Rembrandt who are torn between following their parents' ambitions and their own artistic gifts by describing a hallway filled

[8] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 48.

[9] Ibid,61,1628/1.

[10] Karel van Mander, *Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const.*, ed. Hessel Miedema (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert, 1973) vol. 1, 71.

with various tools--plows, hammers, axes, ladles, books, and brushes--which gifts "mild Nature" assigns to babies, even before they suck at their mother's breast. Foolish parents often mistake the child's natural talent so that born painters walk behind the plow and peasants get hold of a brush. Van Mander's vivid imagery and sympathetic attitude might well hearten a young Latin scholar with an artistic gift and parents who had another career in mind

Het Schilder-boek may also have given Rembrandt a sense of pride in being an artist by continually referring to painting as a "noble" profession and by telling stories of rulers who ordered courtiers of noble birth to do menial jobs for a great painter, such as allowing Leonardo to climb on their backs to reach a high place on his fresco. Moreover, van Mander contended that artists are nobler than aristocrats because, rather than merely being born into nobility, painters achieve it by developing their gifts. One can't help feeling that Rembrandt needed van Mander's and Rector Schrevelius' encouragement to voice his desire to his parents to become an apprentice to a painter instead of continuing on through the university.

That Rembrandt not only read van Mander's book but was strongly influenced by it is shown by the context in which Arnold Houbraken describes Rembrandt's principle of using Nature as his only guide:

> [Karel van Mander] tells that Michelangelo [da Caravaggio] used to say that every picture, whatever it was, and whoever by, was only a childish and trifling affair if everything was not painted from Nature: there was nothing that could be preferred to following Nature . . . . Of the same

> opinion was also our great master Rembrandt who laid down the principle that one should only follow Nature and that everything else was worthless to him .[11]

Rembrandt's Latin school training thus gave him a unique background for an artist of his time. He had the opportunity to read van Mander and think about art by himself instead of early being under the influence of a master artist trained in Italy to follow the academic "rules of art." Furthermore his own natural gifts moved him to become an artist.

Orlers follows his report on Rembrandt's reaction to his parents' plans for him to have a university education with this statement:

> Therefore his parents were compelled to take him out of school, and according to his wish they brought and apprenticed him to a painter from whom he would learn the basic and principal rules of art. As a result of this decision, they took him to the good painter, Mr. Jacob Isaacxsz. van Swanenburch, to be instructed and taught by him. He stayed with him for about three years, during which time his progress was so great that art-lovers were most amazed, for it was clearly evident that he would one day become an exceptional painter.
> His father then agreed to bring and board him at the renowned painter P. Las[t]man, who lived in Amsterdam, for further and better instruction. He stayed with him about six months, but then decided to engaged in and practice the art of painting entirely on his own.[12]

Orlers' statement that "his parents were compelled to take

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[11] Houbraken, in Goldscheider, *Rembrandt* 27-28.

[12] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 216, 1641 /8.

him out of school," with its implication that Rembrandt left Latin school before he graduated is problematic. The document that states Rembrandt registered as a student at the University of Leiden on May 20, 1620, the year he would turn fourteen is strong evidence that he completed Latin school in the Spring of 1620.[13]

The idea that Rembrandt began his apprenticeship before he finished Latin school may have been invented by Orlers to deflect his Leiden readers from recalling the short but bloody religious civil war between the Remonstrants (liberal Calvinists) and the Contra-Remonstrants (orthodox Calvinists) in which Orlers, an orthodox Calvinist, came out a winner but many of his Leiden readers did not.

E. Elias, a Leidener, reviewing the history of his city of that period, describes how the Remonstrant town council hired mercenaries to defend the town because they did not trust their own militia, fearing that they might side with the Contra-Remonstrants backed by Prince Maurice. Despite their local strength and the heavy fortifications with guns ready for action on Breestrat (only a few blocks from where Rembrandt lived with his family) the Remonstrants, supported by the States General and their leader, Johan van Oldenbarneveldt, were forced to surrender by Prince Maurice's militia in 1618. Oldenbarneveldt was beheaded, Johannes Wtenbogaert fled the country, Hugo de Groot (Grotius) was imprisoned and the members of the town council and most of the faculty members at the university were ousted and replaced by Contra-Remonstrants. Elias concludes: "There followed a period of distress, particularly for the Remonstrants, who, having suffered

[13] Ibid. 51, 1620/1.

defeat, amply experienced the consequences thereof."[14]

This violent change ousted the liberal Calvinists from their positions on the faculty of the university and in the city government and replaced them with orthodox Calvinists, including Orlers, in 1618. In that year Orlers, a strong supporter of Prince Maurice, "became a member of the ruling Council of Forty and eventually, in 1631, a burgomaster."[15]

Orlers, still the burgomaster of Leiden in 1641 when Rembrandt's biography was published, may have been particularly careful not to allude to Leiden's painful past in his biographies of famous Leideners because his position as an orthodox Calvinist was no longer secure. Prince Maurice, whom he had supported so heavily, died in 1625 and was succeeded by his more moderate brother, Prince Frederick Hendrick. Frederick Hendrick lifted the ban against Remonstrants holding church services and thus opened the way for them to be active again in the community. Furthermore, Prince Frederick Hendrick did not favor the orthodox Calvinists. He intervened in 1628 when the orthodox Calvinists tried to oust the Remonstrant city council in Amsterdam.[16]

Leiden, however, had not changed back to a Remonstrant city council. Orlers and the other orthodox Calvinists, still held the power. Orlers thus may have wanted to avoid any statement in 1641 that might remind Leideners of what happened in 1618.

If Orlers had reported that Rembrandt matriculated at the

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[14]E. Elias, *Leyden*, trans. Flora van Os-Gammon ('s-Gravenhage: N.V. Uitgeverij W. Van Hoeve, 1961) 7-8.

[15]Schwartz, *Rembrandt*. 20.

[16]Ibid., 138.

university in 1620 but then instead of continuing through the university became an apprentice to a master, many of his readers who were citizens of Leiden might have thought back to the conflict between the Remonstrants and the Contra-Remonstrants. These Leiden citizens might have concluded that Rembrandt's parents encouraged him to finish Latin school with the hope that in those two years there would be a return to a more liberal faculty at the university. These long-time Leideners might then have reasoned that at least part of the reason why Rembrandt did not continue as a student at the university was that the faculty in 1620 remained orthodox Calvinist.

This early period of Rembrandt's life is so crucial for his later development as an artist that it is worth reviewing these key factors that underlay his creative process.

The fact that Rembrandt registered at the university despite his desire to start his apprenticeship probably was for his parents' sake: to have it on the record that he matriculated at the university. After two years of hoping that the Remonstrants would regain faculty positions at the University of Leiden, it must have become clear to Rembrandt's parents that the orthodox Calvinists were firmly entrenched.

Once he was a student at the university, he must have convinced his parents that he needed to begin his apprenticeship in order to become a painter. He was already starting very late. It is likely that he consoled them by promising that his paintings would be his sermons. Certainly many of his paintings, etchings and drawings express a deep commitment to Christ and to God, without

any obvious allegiance to a particular religious denomination.

That his leaning was to a more liberal religious view than orthodox Calvinism is suggested by his later sympathetic portraits of the leading Remonstrants who survived: Johannes Wtenbogaert, Hugo de Groot and of such other leaders of religious groups as the Anabaptist minister Rev. Cornelis Claes Anslo.

Rembrandt's heritage and early years gave him a unique background for an artist of his time. His first eighteen years were the bedrock for the rest of his life. He was a Leidener whose roots were deep. His paternal great-great grandfather had milled grain for St. Catherine's hospital in Leiden.[17] . This long family history of solid contribution to a particular community gave him a feeling that each person had work that they needed to do as their part in the world in which they lived. Working had been a central part of living for his family for generations and generations and he was to carry on that tradition.

Growing up in Leiden was important in another way. Its heroic tradition during the siege in which his grandmother played an integral part gave him an example of courage under adversity that may well have helped him during the difficult times in his life. His ability to keep creating even during the crises of his life may have come from both the family tradition of working and the example of the bravery of the Leideners during the siege.

His close relationships to his mother and father during his childhood were also of central importance to the man he would become. He was the youngest son of a mother who obviously found great joy in giving him a rich grounding in the Bible and imparting to

[17] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 21, 1484/1.

him her deep religious faith. He must have received an individual religious education intuitively adjusted to his capacity as he grew from an infant to a small child. It seems very likely that it was her reading again and again the great human sagas of the Old and New Testaments in their Bible that impressed them so deeply and vividly into his memory. But much more came from that loving relationship between mother and son. Through reading and talking with him, she must have discovered how easily he understood what she was reading and how deeply he felt about what she was telling him. Through these interactions she not only stimulated his already keen mind and vivid imagination but became convinced that he was unusually gifted.

It was in those early years that his mother and father realized that Rembrandt should not follow in his father's trade which would mean gradually taking over the hard job of being a miller from his father as he aged. His parents must have had many conversations about Rembrandt's future.

It was a momentous decision for this older couple whose families for generations and generations had been millers and bakers to decide to enroll Rembrandt in Latin school. He would have to learn much that they knew nothing about. He would have to spend his days among boys who were the sons of noblemen, doctors, lawyers, members of the Leiden council, the children of the people of influence and power in the community. The spirit of equality in Leiden had to have been strong for his father and mother to believe that their gifted son could make his way in Latin school.

As a young boy starting in Latin school, Rembrandt no doubt

felt that his parents had placed great faith in him by giving up having him work as a miller's apprentice. It meant too that later he would be unable to help his father. And in addition they had to pay his tuition for Latin school. Their trust in him gave him a belief in his own self-worth that would never be shaken.

Theodorus Schrevelius, the rector of the Latin school, evidently took a great interest in Rembrandt. Years later after Rembrandt had finished Latin school, completed his apprenticeship, and was working in his own studio, Schrevelius had as his house guest a learned jurist from Utrecht who was writing a book about the artists of his time. On January 10, 1628 the jurist made a note to himself that included the statement: "Also, the son of a miller in Leiden is esteemed highly, though prematurely."[18] It might well be that the person who esteemed Rembrandt "highly, though prematurely" was none other than his host, the rector of Rembrandt's Latin school.

The role of Schrevelius in encouraging Rembrandt in his art during his school years can, of course, only be inferred. Yet the fact that Rembrandt's parents did not become embittered by the path that their son had chosen, one that was so divergent from what they had hoped and dreamed for him, may have been due at least in part to Schrevelius' ability to communicate to them his belief in Rembrandt's great gift. And it may have been Schrevelius too who helped keep the eager artist Rembrandt in Latin school and even persuaded him to matriculate at the university to make it easier for his parents to accept this drastic comedown from their son being an important member of the Leiden community to his being only an

[18] Strauss,61, 1628/1.

artist after his apprenticeship. For he would become a painter in a society where those who worked with their hands were judged as much less worthy than those who were doctors, lawyers, burgomasters or ministers. We do not know how the impetuous strong-minded young student in his early teens managed to change to his chosen career without severing relations with his family, but it seems likely that Schrevelius helped.

And in a strange stroke of fate the removal of the liberal faculty from the university and substitution of orthodox Calvinists as a result of the religious civil war was probably a help to Rembrandt because his mother and father realized that neither the training that they had hoped for nor the career that they had dreamed of were available to their son any longer.

Rembrandt would have been an entirely different artist without his Latin school years. He would not have been familar with such authors as Quintillian, Plutarch, Ovid and Tacitus, to name some of those from whom he gained inspiration. And he would not have had such a feeling for the great philosophers and creators of the past. We think particularly of his *Aristotle*.

Without the years in Latin school he also would not have developed his independent stance on the criterion for "proper execution" of a painting. He must have decided on his basic principle of Nature being his only guide in Latin school. His masters van Swanenburch and Lastman had been trained traditionally. Both had studied in Italy, and their pictures indicate that they followed what Sandrart meant by "the rules of art." Rembrandt's basic approach to art probably came from a combination of reading and interpreting

classical authors and Karel van Mander. Van Mander's *Het Schilder-boek* looks to have been a pivotal formative influence on him.

Rembrandt's apprenticeships, however, were of course essential. It was through the direct experience in his masters' studios that he developed his skill in painting. Through his apprenticeship of three years to van Swanenburch he learned so quickly the basic techniques required in painting pictures that, as Orlers states: "art lovers were amazed." His six months with Lastman gave him an understanding of the essentials of history painting, a type of painting for which he would show a special capacity. Lastman would also influence his style during his first years.

Neither of the masters whom Rembrandt's parents chose for their son's apprenticeship espoused an orthodox Calvinism. Both van Swanenburch and Pieter Lastman were Catholics and van Swanenburch's family was closely identified with the Remonstrants,[19] a fact indicating that Rembrandt and his parents shared a religious liberalism.

In the following chapters we will be considering his paintings, etchings, and some of his drawings from the years 1625 through 1631. Our approach to his work will be chronological in order to see the interrelationship between different pictures in the same general period and the changes in themes and their treatment over time.

Our chronicle begins with 1625, the year that Rembrandt turned nineteen and painted his first known picture and continues through 1631, the year that Rembrandt moved to Amsterdam and became twenty-five.

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[19] Schwartz, *Rembrandt*, 22.

As we view his pictures, we will be particularly interested in the emotions and circumstances that initiated the choice of the subject and in the ways that the pictures transcended these initiating conditions.

The pictures will be identified by title and, in nearly all cases, by one of the following catalogue numbers. The *Bredius number* (Br.) will identify the paintings which can be located in *Rembrandt Paintings*.[20] The etchings will be cited by the *Bartsch number* (Ba.) and can be located in *The Complete Etchings of Rembrandt*.[21] The drawings will include their *Benesch number* (Be.) and their *Slive number* (Sl.) and can be located in *The Drawings of Rembrandt* Volume I and II.[22]

The few exceptions to this identification method will be Rembrandt works that have been recently discovered or works of other artists to which Rembrandt refers. These will be listed by author, title of book, and page number of the relevant picture.

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[20] A. Bredius and H. Gerson *Rembrandt Paintings* 4th ed.,(London: Phaidon Press, 1971).

[21] Gary Schwartz, *The Complete Etchings of Rembrandt* (New York: Dover, 1994).

[22] Seymour Slive, *Drawings of Rembrandt* vol 1, vol. 2 (New York: Dover, 1965).

CHAPTER 2

MISSIONARY PAINTER LIVING AT HOME

1625, 1626

Rembrandt spent three years as an apprentice to Jacob Isaacsz. van Swanenburch of Leiden, probably begining about June 1620, and then boarded for six months, probably from June through November 1623, with Pieter Lastman. He then, as Orlers reported, "decided to engage in and practice the art of painting entirely on his own."[1]

His first known painting *The Martyrdom of St. Stephen* (Br. 531 A) is dated 1625, the year he turned nineteen. It's a shocker. Stephen is kneeling, looking heavenward, surrounded by angry young men with stones and rocks in their upraised hands. Rembrandt portrayed himself right in the midst of the action, behind St. Stephen, looking out with his mouth open, calling to us. The left side of the painting and the immediate foreground are dark and shadowy with the figures facing inward, making us, the viewers, part of the scene. We join the witnesses to Stephen's stoning, including the looming figure of Saul on horseback. Saul, who later became the Apostle Paul, continued to persecute the Christians until his dramatic conversion, a delayed reaction to witnessing Stephen's death.

Rembrandt's painting his self-portrait right into this picture of St. Stephen's being attacked by young men shows how strong his feeling of identification was with Stephen. Rembrandt must have

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[1] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 219, 1641/8.

felt great similarities between Stephen and himself. Stephen was the first chosen of the new generation of disciples beyond the original twelve. Rembrandt might well have considered himself the first of a new generation of religious painters. Both of them gave early evidence of extraordinary ability. The Bible says: "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." (Acts 6.8). We know from Orlers of the Leiden art lovers' amazement at Rembrandt's progress when he was still an apprentice with van Swanenburgh which was even remembered later by whoever gave Orlers his information about Rembrandt.[2]

There is a real possibility too that Rembrandt found St. Stephen a kindred spirit for another reason: Stephen was so persuasive that he was soon a threat to the old religion. When charges were brought against him, he gave an extensive review of biblical history ending with challenging criticisms that enraged his listeners. As the Bible vividly puts it: "they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." (Acts 7.54.) Rembrandt's *The Martyrdom of St. Stephen* itself provides evidence that in this early painting he was already creating challenges.

Just as Stephen criticized religious orthodoxy, calling his opponents "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears," so Rembrandt's *St. Stephen* is a very extensive revision of the *Stoning of Saint Stephen*[3] by Adam Elsheimer, an admired friend of his master, Pieter Lastman. Lastman knew Elsheimer when he was in Rome and was strongly influenced by him. Rembrandt, mindful of his principle that Nature should be his only guide and its corollary that

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[2] Ibid., 216.

[3] Gottfried Sello, *Adam Elsheimer* (Munich: Oscar Beck, 1988) no. 16, 112.

a painting should be executed with the deepest and most life-like emotion, derived his picture from Elsheimer's small painting on copper, but he significantly changed and improved on Elsheimer's work. Most importantly Rembrandt's Stephen is the biblical character who remained stalwart even when his listeners "gnashed on him with their teeth." His Stephen does not falter, even in the face of imminent death. Elsheimer's Stephen is quite different. His mouth hangs open; his hands hang down flaccidly--hardly a convincing picture of a courageous hero. Rembrandt also eliminated the hovering angels which are not mentioned in the Bible, altered the shape from vertical to horizontal, and revised many details.

Copying the masters was a fundamental part of learning to become an artist, but Rembrandt's picture goes far beyond a copy. His is a new work that used Elsheimer's painting as a source for a bold interpretation of his own. His changes in the characterization of Stephen are particularly telling. Surely they reflect Rembrandt's dictum on the importance of being true to Nature and infusing a painting with feeling. His Stephen is steadfast, kneeling to ask God's forgiveness for the assailants who are stoning him to death. Through his self-portrait Rembrandt expresses his concern for Stephen and contacts us, the viewers, urging us to pay attention to this biblical lesson taking place before us.

The Bible says nothing about the age of Stephen's assailants; yet Rembrandt painted Stephen being stoned by *young men.* Orlers wrote that Rembrandt remained about six months with Lastman, an unusually short stay for an apprentice, even for one who was starting so late and who was already so outstanding.

It may be that the older apprentices at Lastman's studio were so hostile as to make Rembrandt cut short his stay. They may have resented Rembrandt, the "new boy" in Lastman's studio. Instead of coming up through the ranks, he was a scholar-turned-painter who had already astounded the Leiden art lovers. Yet at seventeen he was at least as old as the well-established apprentices who had reached senior status in the pecking order. When Rembrandt began as a Latin scholar, these aspiring young artists had been given such lowly tasks as sweeping the floor and grinding colors. Through the years, they slowly learned the basic skills of painting and were able to participate more fully in the work of the master's studio. It is unlikely that they took kindly to this interloper who had avoided the long years of apprenticeship that they had withstood and had instead gone to Latin school with the sons of the rich and the high born. Moreover, his rapid development, which no doubt continued in Amsterdam, could well have made some of his fellow apprentices who had been plugging away for nine or ten years jealous and vindictive.

Rembrandt may also have expressed his impatience with unnatural portrayals and poor draftsmanship, even possibly demonstrating alternatives with pen and brush. Just as Stephen's hearers "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake," so Rembrandt's younger hearers may have been swayed by his comments and his skill. The older ones, however, may have been resentful.

Rembrandt's manifest self-respect may also have been galling to Lastman's older pupils. At first glance his signature on the *St.*

Stephen seems modest enough, "R. f.," *Rembrandt fecit*, that is, "made by Rembrandt." But with it he expressed his consciousness of his destiny, ranking himself with those few great artists whose surnames are unneeded, such as Michelangelo and Leonardo. At nineteen he already saw himself as, simply, "Rembrandt," not an easy self-perception to hide from less gifted apprentices in Lastman's studio.

In addition Lastman may have treated Rembrandt more as an equal than as a new apprentice. Did Rembrandt tell Lastman and his friends that an artist's only guide should be Nature? In Rembrandt's depiction of the biblical scene in which the elders question Stephen (in the upper background), the older men gather around the young Stephen, showing great interest in what he has to say. For the older apprentices, observing their master and his peers listening carefully to the new apprentice could have been the last straw. The biblical story makes clear that it was the very truth and persuasiveness of Stephen's words that set off his attackers.

Lastman's older apprentices overcome by jealous vindictiveness toward Rembrandt must have created a difference in degree rather than in kind from the hostility that St. Stephen underwent. The senior apprentices probably wounded him symbolically, rather than physically attacking him, yet there may have been physical acts as well.

Rembrandt's choice of St. Stephen's story as one of his earliest subjects for a painting, then, most likely arose from the similarities which he intuitively felt between himself and St. Stephen. Like Stephen he was young, "full of faith and power" and

"did great wonders among the people." But he must have been attracted also to the fact that Stephen stood up for what he believed and consequently was attacked and martyred.

Rembrandt identified with the martyred evangelist not only because of their similar positions as threatening young innovators, but also because both had strong religious convictions to express. That this early painting is a corrected and improved version of Rembrandt's master's friend's work may also have symbolized to Rembrandt that he was the first of a *new* generation of religious painters.

Rembrandt emphasized the moment when Stephen, kneeling, asks God to forgive those who are stoning him to death. Rembrandt's painting urges its viewers, witnesses like Saul to Stephen's sacrifice, to dedicate their lives to Christ. It also warns against condemning young visionaries. And finally, it advocates forgiveness. Stephen forgave those who would destroy him The picture suggests that the viewer would do well to follow his example.

Thus, through the very act of painting *The Martyrdom of St. Stephen* Rembrandt transcended the real-life incident that probably first attracted him to the story of St. Stephen. Painting it must have helped him to forgive his own enemies and to continue to affirm his religious and artistic beliefs. Through it he also implemented his resolve to use his artistic skills to paint religious pictures that represent life by reflecting his own experience.

In the following year, 1626, the year he became twenty, Rembrandt created what was probably his first etching: *The Circumcision* (Ba. 398). Unlike painting techniques which

Rembrandt learned through his apprenticeship to two traditionally trained painters, he evidently largely taught himself etching and printing. His beginning is very ambitious. On a large plate: 17 x 21 centimeters, Rembrandt etched a complex interior scene with twelve figures. Despite his etching's crude elements, each person's individual expression is vivid.

Just as *Martyrdom of St. Stephen* seems a particularly appropriate subject for a very early painting, so *The Circumcision* is an excellent choice for what was probably his first work in the encising medium of etching. In his portrayal of this Jewish religious ceremony, the instrument that the high priest uses to circumcise the baby is similar to an etching needle. Furthermore the subject of this etched print, the covenant between man and God through *the bonding of a newborn to the community* is very suitable for his first etched picture. The medium of etching with its lower costs and its potential for multiple copies offered Rembrandt a broader and less affluent audience for his messages than painting.

Both *St. Stephen* and *The Circumcision* testify to the centrality of his religious understanding to his work and his awareness of the implications of the biblical stories, a theme that will be struck again and again throughout his life in his paintings, etchings and drawings. Instead of becoming an outstanding *predikant*, he would convincingly convey the underlying messages of the Old and New Testament stories through his pictures.

In 1626 Rembrandt followed up the *St. Stephen* with another painting that is a strong contrast to it, even though a kneeling young man is again the focus of attention. *Baptism of the Eunuch* is a

tribute to his teacher, Pieter Lastman, to whom he considered he owed a great debt.[4]

Baptism of the Eunuch illustrates an event in the ministry of Philip, the next chosen after Stephen to help Christ's disciples spread the Word. In his travels Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch who was trying to understand the Bible on his own. After Philip interpreted a passage that had puzzled him, the eunuch asked Philip to baptize him. *Baptism* portrays the moment when the kneeling eunuch is baptized. The evangelist was the focus of the *St. Stephen*; the convert is the center of *Baptism*. And while St. Stephen knelt before his God, the eunuch kneels before his intermediary and teacher, Philip. Stephen was sure of his convictions and what he must do; indeed, he almost flaunted his vision. In contrast, the eunuch, had been struggling along without any guide, until his meeting with Philip enables him to find his way.

Rembrandt, having proclaimed through the *St. Stephen* his independence, his giftedness and his capacity to shatter traditions, then acknowledged his debt to his teacher. It was Lastman who profoundly influenced him, even though Rembrandt learned the basics of his craft from Jacob van Swanenburgh. Rembrandt demonstrated Lastman's influence by the choices he made in constructing this picture. He based it on four of Lastman's paintings of the "Baptism of the Eunuch." Although Rembrandt did not exactly reproduce any motif from them, "yet in their overall form each and every one of the ingredients of the composition was borrowed from

[4] This painting is not reproduced in Bredius, *Rembrandt Paintings*. It can be found in Astrid Trümpel and Peter Schatborn, *Pieter Lastman*, (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1991) 58, no.4.

Lastman's work," as the Rembrandt Research Team observes.[5]

To emphasize to himself how beholden he was to Lastman, Rembrandt even selected Philip's baptismal gesture from Lastman's *Baptism of the Eunuch*[6] that his master painted the year that Rembrandt was his apprentice, 1623. By copying Lastman's baptismal gesture, albeit from a different perspective, Rembrandt symbolized his gratitude to his teacher for "baptizing" him into their common calling: "history painting," the depiction of biblical and historical subjects.

Through Lastman he learned skills that would enable him to paint convincing biblical interpretations. In an analysis of Lastman's paintings Astrid Tümpel notes his literal, accurate, and compelling treatment of biblical themes.[7] Rembrandt adopted these goals of Lastman's and remained true to them throughout his career. *Baptism of the Eunuch*, then, is Rembrandt's personal tribute to his master, a doubly appropriate one since his teacher so frequently painted the subject himself.

Rembrandt also expressed a sense of indebtedness to others in the way he signed the *Baptism of the Eunuch*. In contrast to the "*R. f.*" on the *St. Stephen*, he signed this painting with his monogram RH, Rembrandt, Herman's son. He thus acknowledged the role of his biological father as well as his artistic one.

Rembrandt's gratitude to his teacher did not, however, lead him to suppress his originality and his critical acumen. As

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[5] Bruyn et al., *Corpus* vol.1, 101.

[6] Tümpel and Schatborn, *Lastman*, 59, no. 5.

[7] Astrid Tümpel, *Gods, Saints & Heroes* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1980) 126.

Christian Tümpel points out, Rembrandt in his *Baptism* changed the format to vertical from Lastman's horizontal one making the story easier to understand and corrected his master's mistake of depicting a European tree in a biblical scene by substituting a palm tree.[8]

Rembrandt's painting of the *Baptism* makes clear that for Rembrandt looking over one of his own paintings later was in itself an experience that could create feelings within him that would then lead him to create another painting. Thus when he looked back at the *St. Stephen.* he realized that he had overstated his independence. He then followed it with the *Baptism.*

These personal aspects of his *Baptism* provide originality and vividness to this biblical painting which expresses the brotherhood of all seekers, the hope of rebirth, and the value of spiritual guidance.

Later in 1626 Rembrandt painted another picture that also referred to his *St. Stephen.* Again it includes a young man kneeling. Furthermore the painting resembles the *St. Stephen* in its dimensions, its inclusion of a self-portrait, and its signature of "R. f.", suggesting that this new painting also deals with his life as an artist. A number of art historians think it concerns Roman history, but many different titles have been suggested including: *The Justice of Brutus, Judgment on the Son of Manlius Torquatus, Saul Sentencing Jonathan, Clemency of the Emperor Titus, Consul Cerealis Pardoning the Legions,* and *Palamedes before Agamemnon.*

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[8] Christian Tümpel, "Pieter Lastman and Rembrandt" in Tümpel and Schatborn, *Lastman,* 59, 60.

We shall adopt the Rembrandt Research Project title[9] and call it simply *The History Painting* (Br. 460).

The contrast between Rembrandt's self-portrait in *St. Stephen* and in *The History Painting* is marked. In *St. Stephen* he looked directly out at the viewers with an expression of urgent concern. In *The History Painting*, however, he is partially hidden behind the ruler's scepter. and it is hard to be sure of his expression. He is a spear-carrying member of the entourage of this prominent leader who is clearly a worldly ruler, possibly a Roman emperor. Looking more closely at Rembrandt's face, his expression is rather glum, his eyes staring, his mouth set. Certainly the feeling that this self-portrait conveys is that he is unenthusiastic about where he finds himself.

The fact that Rembrandt developed the composition of the part of *The History Painting* that portrays the emperor and those that surround him from one of Lastman's paintings, his *Coriolanus*,[10] suggests that the emperor symbolizes Lastman. Rembrandt depicted himself as an immature youth in the emperor's entourage, in a more privileged position than the mature man at the left of the picture, a handsome, confident dandy in his full maturity, a fine figure of a man. This man who stands one step below the emperor, yet even so almost reaches his height, is painted in a style reminiscent of Frans Hals. Hals, who was in his mid-forties, was not as eminent as Lastman primarily because history painting was more valued than Hals' specialty, portraiture.

Rembrandt symbolized the range and style of both painters by

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[9] Bruyn et al., *Corpus* 1, 104.

[10] Tümpel and Schatborn, *Lastman*, 125, no. 20.

the implement each figure holds. The emperor, the Lastman figure, wields a long, thin, ornate scepter, while the Hals figure grasps a shorter, thicker, simple stave. Thus Rembrandt considered that Lastman painted a wider range of subjects in a detailed style, while Hals, who restricted himself to portraits, employed a powerful direct style. Rembrandt gave the Halsian figure in his painting an air of assurance besides which the Lastman figure looks inadequate for all his glorified position. By the contrast in their expressions and the difference in their heights, Rembrandt indicated that he considered Hals as having greater stature than Lastman. As for himself, in the dim section of the painting next to the emperor's head we see Rembrandt's hand grasping a very high, detailed spear, which appears to continue beyond the painting!

Rembrandt's reference to Lastman's *Coriolanus* may have implications for the subject of the painting as well. Coriolanus was an accessible historical subject, and the scene in his life that Lastman chose was dramatic and had the approved classical ambience, complete with men on horseback in full military regalia and women kneeling and weeping. But Coriolanus only appears heroic to those who do not know Roman history. Latin scholars would recognize Coriolanus as a turncoat who joined an enemy army and then invaded his native land, killing many people and despoiling the country.

Lastman portrayed the moment when Coriolanus was camped on the outskirts of his native city, Rome, about to conquer it as the leader of a foreign army. He had already rebuffed the peaceful overtures of the Roman ambassadors and priests. In Lastman's

picture the Roman women, including Coriolanus's mother and his wife, prostrate themselves before him in a desperate effort to save their city. The fact that Coriolanus does withdraw as a result of this final appeal hardly makes him a hero.

Rembrandt, who would have known Coriolanus's story from reading Plutarch in Latin school, is unlikely to have chosen him as a hero. Rembrandt after all was born and grew up in Leiden, a city with a truly heroic tradition. And his grandmother and presumeably his father were in Leiden during that heroic period.[11] This painting then may also be about the difference that Rembrandt felt between his values and those of his master, Lastman.

The History Painting's similarity in size and shape to *St. Stephen* suggests that it is a sequel. One figure in the *St. Stephen*, Saul on horseback, is a link to Lastman's *Coriolanus*: the prominent horseman facing into the picture on the same side of the painting as *St. Stephen.* If we look to the later history of Saul, he becomes St. Paul who was sent to Rome in A.D. 60 and kept under house guard during the reign of the emperor Nero (Acts 21.27-28,31). The circumstances of Paul's death are unknown. He may have been executed in A.D. 62, or beheaded a few years later at the time of Nero's persecution of the Christians.

Rembrandt gave the scene in *The History Painting* certain characteristics that associate the ruler with Nero. The provincial swearing allegiance holds a shield with a symbol of Helios, the sun god, radiating behind a sensual, rather cruel-looking face. Roman coins indicate that Nero used this symbol and identified himself with Helios. Furthermore, the background, on the right, which Horst

[11] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 25, 1574/1&2.

Gerson considers to be "in the fluent manner of Lastman"[12] reveals a strange sight. People are bound to a column with a lamb on top and wood piled beneath. This scene may well refer to the report by the Roman historian Tacitus that Nero, having accused a group of Christians of setting the great fire in Rome, had them burned as festival torches.[13] This hidden scene in Lastman's style, combined with the portrayal of the ruler whose liege bears Nero's symbol set in a composition influenced by Lastman suggests that Rembrandt symbolized Lastman as a painter who did not concern himself about morality. Lastman could even have chosen Nero as well as Coriolanus for a falsely heroic representation, glossing over his brutality.

Perhaps *The History Painting* was the result of Rembrandt's reaction to local art lovers who viewed Rembrandt's paintings as the work of a gifted follower of the revered master Pieter Lastman, the leading practitioner of the most respected artistic speciality in Holland: history painting. Rembrandt's individuality was obscured by his master's sceptre. They failed to see him as a challenging spiritual and artistic leader, a St. Stephen of painting.

This crowded and enigmatic painting may well reveal the conflict Rembrandt felt regarding the kind of admiration he received from the Leiden art lovers. They saw only how similar he was to his master and overlooked the crucial difference between them: the spiritual content of his work that was central to his mission as an artist. Rembrandt must have painted *The History Painting* to clarify for himself what disturbed him most about being viewed as

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[12] Bredius, *Rembrandt Paintings*, 591.

[13] Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 44, trans. M. Grant (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 365

Lastman's disciple; but he had to keep the message veiled or he would have offended many people. He therefore buried within an ambigous Roman history painting hints of how he felt about Lastman, Hals, the viewing public, and--with his signature, R.f.--his destiny as an artist. By this process of encoding his feelings, Rembrandt affirmed his admiration for Hals and his commitment to spiritually responsible art.

These paintings of 1626 have illuminated his identity as an artist. In that year he also created pictures on another personal theme: his relations with his family, when he returned home again after he left Lastman's studio. He constructed *The Music-makers* (Br.632) with the same dimensions as *Baptism of the Eunuch* and signed the picture with the same monogram, RH, suggesting that it too emphasizes his relationship to others rather than his individuality. An indoor scene of three musicians and a listener, it appears to be an allegorical representation of Harmony. It is generally considered that he used members of his own family for this painting of making and listening to music together.[14] And because they wear costumes that are associated with different countries, as a group they seem cosmopolitan.

His younger sister Elisabeth is in the most prominent position wearing a long, embroidered dress, red shoes, and the elaborate headdress of a princess, as she sits looking at a large book of music and keeping the beat with her hand. A little further back and somewhat to the left is an older man, probably Rembrandt's elder

[14] Jacob Rosenberg and Seymour Slive in Jacob Rosenberg, Seymour Slive ,and E.H. ter Kuiile *Dutch Art and Architecture: 1600 to 1800* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966, paperback rev., 1972) 81.

brother Gerrit. He is dressed in the embroidered coat of an oriental potentate, a red sash, and a turban, and playing the viola da gamba. Further back and to the right is his mother, her face shadowed by the multicolored shawl on her head, listening intently to the music. In the back is Rembrandt as a troubadour playing a small harp. The feather in Rembrandt's hat is reminiscent of Frans Hals, the portrait artist he referred to so positively in *The History Painting.*

Rembrandt portrayed himself in *The Music-makers* as earnest, eager, and a little timid--a good son and brother. He caught an inner intensity in his mother's eyes, so luminous in the shadows. The way she enters so fully into the posing shows that any doubts she may have had about her youngest son's decision to give up his university education have by this time been replaced by cooperative support. His older brother and younger sister, who appear none-too-tractable, are also willing enough to spend time dressing up and posing for their artist brother.

In this painting Rembrandt set himself a number of challenges. He refined his portrait skills by facing each model in a different direction and arranging their hands in a variety of poses. His choice of objects also seems designed to expand his technical repertoire. The fabrics differ in texture, patterning, and draping quality. He also required himself to render closed books with different kinds of leather bindings and open ones with musical notations and with print. And the composition includes objects with interesting reflective qualities such as the silver cup, violin and mandolin. This self-imposed exercise succeeds brilliantly: *The Music-makers* is a technical tour-de-force.

Even though Rembrandt portrays himself as a quiet homebody, he created this exotic setting for his own plebeian family, the children and wife of a miller. He managed to scare up rare materials, objects, and costumes to realize his vision, which required not only a painter but a stage manager.[15] The books and instruments in the foreground are rendered in the manner of a group of contemporary Leiden artists who specialized in still lifes of such precious objects.[16]

The painting within the painting on the wall behind the musicians shows Lot fleeing with his family to the town of Zoar from the city of Sodom. Here Rembrandt alluded to the moral contrast between Leiden and Amsterdam. An international port since the 1300s, Amsterdam by Rembrandt's day rivaled Sodom and Gomorrah. Prostitution throve, as it continues to do to this day. Even at midday sailors on the streets can see young women in their windows, waiting for customers. The little painting of Lot and his family thus symbolizes Rembrandt's own flight from the sins of Amsterdam to the safety of Leiden and his home and family.

The Music-makers expresses Rembrandt's happiness at being home again. He depicted his family as a harmonious group of unique beings. Painting the picture, Rembrandt proved to himself that he did not need to travel widely to portray the depth and variety of human experience. And he never would. Instead, his imagination would create foreign scenes and compelling moments in history--at home. Rembrandt's allusion to the Leiden still life painters shows

[15] Although Svetlana Alpers does not refer specifically to *The Music-makers* in her *Rembrandt's Enterprise*, this painting seems to be an early example of his interest in what she describes as "The Theatrical Model."

[16] Rosenberg et al., *Dutch Art and Architecture*, 337.

that he considered that even his home town had a group of painters from whom he could learn.

Apparently, however, living and working at home began to wear thin. In contrast to *The Music-makers*, *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple* (Br. 532) portrays a group of people on top of one another in an all-too-small space, engaged in activities which are antithetical to contemplation. This smallest of his paintings to date dramatizes the young Christ's outrage at the presence of moneychangers in the temple. The biblical text is Matthew 21:12:

> And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Rembrandt's picture shows Jesus with his arm upraised about to hit the moneychangers. One flees, another shields his face, while two of them have their hands over the money. Rembrandt has concentrated the action into a crowded close-up. The arrangement is so cramped that Schwartz considers Rembrandt "oversteps the bounds of artistic propriety [by] compressing figures and motifs into a confined space."[17] Schwartz's discomfort attests to the success of the composition in conveying the sense of too many people in close quarters. Five people are crowded together, six, if we count the hand in the background.

Rembrandt's mission of creating spiritually moving paintings

[17] Schwartz, *Rembrandt*, 42.

required meditation on his inner world. This picture portrays a violent outburst as virtuous because the anger is directed at those who disrupt "my house, the house of prayer." Christ is particularly angry at an older man with a turban who looks like the viola da gamba player in *The Music-makers*, Rembrandt's eldest brother, Gerrit. Gerrit may well have been around the house disturbing the painter's concentration. In 1621 Rembrandt's parents added a codicil to their will providing Gerrit, whose right hand had been partially disabled in an accident, with an annual pension after their death.[18] Clearly his parents were supporting Gerrit already and did not expect him to be able to earn a living. Another brother, Adriaan, a cobbler nine years older than Rembrandt, is probably the man trying to shield his face from Christ's blows. After a hard day of shoemaking, Adriaan must have hoped to find his brother convivial; instead Rembrandt evidently wanted to be left alone. The older people, the bearded moneychanger looking down and holding his hand over the money and the one with luminous eyes holding onto the money bag tightly and pulling the coins closer, may represent his parents. In the background to the right of the fleeing man is a small hand which looks like another view of the hand of his sister in *The Music-makers*.

His depiction of his parents as moneychangers suggests that he was still dependent upon them. He must not yet have sold any of his paintings. Perhaps his parents were unwilling to provide him with as much money as he felt he needed for art supplies for paintings, etchings and inspirational objects for his paintings.

We, in our lives, often make a big distinction between the

[18] Strauss, 61, 1621/1.

sacred and the secular. Thus we might judge that Rembrandt was taking the dross of his everyday life and venting his personal frustrations through this painting. Yet for Rembrandt, who believed in Christ's continued presence on earth, the incidents of his own life provided events through which he could gain a new understanding of Christ's life. Thus he was able to see parallels between his own life and Jesus's and to make painted sermons with deep religious feeling out of his own "ordinary" life experiences.

The harmonious family of *The Music-makers* in a sumptuous living room had been succeeded by five or six people crowding in on Christ, disrupting the space that should be consecrated to prayerful meditation. Rembrandt's anger at the constraints and interruptions of life in a busy household probably provided the inspiration for this powerful interpretation of the story of Christ routing the moneychangers. He signs it not RH, "son of Harmen," but rather, R. f. as he did *St. Stephen* and *The History Painting*, once again asserting his identity as a unique artist. The Rembrandt who argued and won his own choice of career around the age of fourteen reemerged in this twentieth year, overruling the subdued, dutiful son he depicted in *The Music-makers*. Yet again the very making of this painting enabled Rembrandt to transform his anger into a painted sermon that could communicate to others Christ's message of the need for a true house of prayer.

As for Rembrandt's problem, the painting could express his anger at being distracted, but of course he could not expect his family to move away. He was the one who would have to leave.

As he began to consider no longer living with his family, he

was reminded of the Old Testament story of Balaam and his ass in the book of Numbers, a story that Lastman had also painted. Rembrandt signed his version of *The Ass of Balaam Balking Before the Angel* (Br. 487) R.f, as he had *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*. In it the king of the Moabites wants Balaam to go with his princes to curse the Israelites but Balaam will not go until God tells him he should. The first time the king's princes come to urge Balaam, God tells him not to go, but the second time God allows him to set out. Three times along the journey Balaam's ass sees the angel of the Lord blocking the way and turns aside. Balaam, however, does not see the angel and each time beats the animal. Rembrandt's picture illustrates the third time the angel blocks the way.

> And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down under Balaam, and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff.
>
> And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? (Numbers 22:27-28)

In Rembrandt's painting Balaam furiously lashes out at the ass with his staff. The ass is on her knees with her head turned and mouth open, looking back and speaking to Balaam. Off to the side and behind Balaam is the angel of the Lord, with drawn sword. Directly behind Balaam are his two servants on foot and the princes on horseback. The panel is a dramatic illustration of the idea that even when we think we are following God's will, we may discover that we are not.

Rembrandt chose a story that focuses on a conflict between a man who believes that God is asking him to leave home and two female figures who block him, his ass and God's angel. Like Jesus in *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*, Balaam strikes out in anger, but whereas Christ's outrage was justified, Balaam's is misguided. He *thinks* his anger is righteous but he does not see the Lord's angel. He keeps whipping the ass to move on, not realizing that she has fallen down at the angel's behest. The ass's head turned back in protest bears much the same relation to Balaam as that of the moneychanger looking up does to Christ whose arm is lifted in anger. Indeed their expressions are quite similar. The ass and her alter ego, the angel, like the moneychanger, reflect Rembrandt's perception of his mother. She would resist the idea of his leaving home and want to block his way.

A loving son, aware of his mother's feelings and his own urge to move out, would anticipate that she would oppose his motions to leave and he would react angrily. This hidden conflict must have reverberated in Rembrandt's mind with of the story of Balaam. Like Balaam's beast of burden, his mother would not understand his anger and would wonder "What have I done unto thee?" Despite his needs for a quiet place of his own, it was hard to justify leaving her, even to himself, since she worked as loyally as Balaam's ass and was as spiritual as an angel of the Lord. Perhaps his urge to move on, like Balaam's, was misguided.

Rather than acting in anger against his mother or being morose about his uncertainty, he put the energy of his conflict into painting a picture that she as well as others could admire. His starting point

was Lastman's painting of the same subject revised to increase the dramatic intensity and make it truer to the biblical story. He placed Balaam closer to the viewers and the angel behind him, to indicate that Balaam does not see her. His rendering of the facial expressions and gestures of Balaam, the ass, and the angel are all more natural than Lastman's. Rembrandt had set himself another technical challenge, the painting of figures in action. The outcome is a definite success. *The Ass of Balaam Balking Before the Angel* will reach Paris in Rembrandt's lifetime.

Even though both *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple* and *The Ass of Balaam Balking Before the Angel* refer to Rembrandt's family, the fact that he signed both of them R. f. rather than RH expressed his feeling that he needed to assert and protect himself from conditions that were inimicable to his work as an artist.

Tobit and Anna (Br. 486) is the final painting in which Rembrandt imbedded his feelings about living at home. It encompasses, and seems to come to terms with, a variety of responses to the idea of leaving his mother: his attachment to her, his desire for independence, the anger toward her that stems from this ambivalence, and remorse for that anger. The painting illustrates a story from the Book of Tobit in the Apocrypha. It depicts the moment just after old Tobit, blind and dependent, has accused his wife, Anna, of stealing a kid. Anna defends herself with righteous indignation, having been given the kid by her employers. Realizing his mistake, Tobit prays God for forgiveness for misunderstanding his wife.

The emotional dynamics of the story are related to those that often arise when grown children live at home. The mother assumes that she should continue to take care of her children. The children, now adults, are, like Tobit, very dependent upon her, yet they resent their dependency and lash out at her. She feels righteously indignant. They are full of remorse.

Rembrandt's references to his mother in *The Music-makers*, *Balaam,* and *Tobit and Anna* depict her as a woman with strong convictions who wants to help her son. A decisive twenty-year-old living in the same house with such a mother might well feel both resentment and remorse. These complex feelings attract Rembrandt to the story of Tobit and Anna, as does the opportunity to use both his mother and father as models.

Rembrandt's portrayals of both figures are very sympathetic. There stands Anna strong enough to carry and hang onto a kid, despite her age. She can hardly believe that her life's companion for whom she has been working hard should accuse her unjustly. And Tobit, heavily robed, deep in his chair by the fire with his cane nearby, is a patriarch brought low by blindness and old age. Both his lashing out at her and his contrition are understandable. The picture urges us to be willing to admit mistakes and ask for forgiveness when we hurt those we love.

For the first time Rembrandt narrowed his focus to two subjects modeled by his parents. Rembrandt's painting of his mother as Anna echoes both her portrait in *The Music-makers* and the expression of the moneychanger looking up in *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*. And his father as Tobit is

reminiscent of the old man in the temple scene. Depicting Tobit seated, with his head tilted back in prayer, allowed Rembrandt to use his father as his model as he slept in his chair after a hard day's work at the mill. Despite Rembrandt's urge to find a place of his own, he affirmed his filial gratitude to his two models by signing the panel, RH, Rembrandt, Harmen's son.

Tobit and Anna is Rembrandt's most successful picture from these years. Of Rembrandt's paintings so far, each alive with his feelings, *Tobit and Anna* is the most empathic. Gone is the conflict between the righteous one and the many thieves in *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple.* Now Rembrandt brings us close to two people, and identifies with both of them. The figure of Tobit symbolizes his dependence upon his mother, his anger at being dependent on her and his regret for the times when the anger showed. And his Anna reflects his mother's righteous indignation and honors her devotion.

Looking at another aspect of the painting, the couple in the painting has a direct correspondence to the couple who were the models. In contrast to the scene of Jesus and the moneychangers crowded together, this panel of slightly larger dimensions is occupied only by one old man and one old woman, alone except for a puppy underfoot and a quiet kid, which a strong woman can easily handle. When Rembrandt left home he would leave behind his father and mother, both about fifty-eight. With them he would also leave himself as a shy child underfoot, like the puppy, and a solemn youngster under the protection of his mother, like the kid.

By turning inward to his own most conflicted feelings and

finding a biblical couple who exemplify such emotions, he infused the scene with life. The biblical subject, the portraits of his parents, and his own inner feelings resonate perfectly together.

Rembrandt's mastery of his craft has grown a great deal in 1626. With each of his six paintings, never repeating a compositional format, he set and met new technical challenges. The *Baptism of the Eunuch* is a vertical landscape with figures grouped in the foreground and middle ground. *The Ass of Balaam*, similar in format, incorporates violent motion. *The History Painting* is a wide outdoor scene filled with figures, while *The Music-makers* is an indoor view with four people and still-life arrangements. Rembrandt also created a cramped close-up full of action, *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*, and finally, an interior close-up focussing on just two people, *Tobit and Anna*.

In this painting of *Tobit and Anna* it is not even necessary to know the biblical story; it can be read in the faces of Tobit and Anna. Rembrandt was already on his own unique path. With *Tobit and Anna*, he reached maturity--artistically, as well as personally. The painting is easily recognizeable to those acquainted with his later work as a "Rembrandt". We quoted Pieter J.J. van Thiel in the Introduction stating that *Tobit and Anna* is "universally regarded as the artist's first masterpiece."[19]

Also in 1626 Rembrandt took another large copper plate of about the same size and shape as the Circumcision and etched *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Ba. 59). In this still crude early etching we see the Holy Family after they were forced to flee their homeland lest they be destroyed. Rembrandt shows a calm respite

[19] van Thiel, *Rembrandt*, 125.

with Mary holding the infant Jesus and feeding him with a spoon, while Joseph holds the dish and smiles. Through this etching of a happy, restful period following a traumatic flight, Rembrandt expressed the positive possibilities of leaving home.

Rembrandt's technical skill in etching has improved noticeably since his first etching, the *Circumcision.* The composition is simplified, more balanced and less crowded and awkward. However, he did make one very glaring error by cutting too deep into the plate in depicting Joseph's eye, so that Joseph looks as if he had on dark glasses.

Reviewing the known pictures of Rembrandt's first two years 1625 and 1626, indicates that two private themes were imbedded in these works: Rembrandt as an artist and Rembrandt living at home. In every picture, however, there was a very appropriate public subject so that the pictures could always be easily "read" with the known subject in mind. (This is even true for *The History Painting* because it could to be classified as a Roman history painting.) Since Rembrandt knew well not only the Bible, but the paintings of other artists such as Lastman and Elsheimer, he was able to choose personally appropriate subjects and prior models through which to express his feelings. This creative process enabled him to enliven his pictures with his emotions, without distorting the public subjects that he chose.

Underlying his approach to his art was his principle of using Nature as his only guide. His own emotions thus became the means for individualizing what could otherwise have been a stereotyped rendition of a particular subject. In the pictures where he used

members of his family as his models, the personal meanings are fused in a particularly rich way. His private feelings about members of his family thus combine with his actual portrayals of them in certain roles that relate to the subject he chose.

We stated in the Introduction that Rembrandt's way of making pictures made it possible for him not only to express his private feelings through publicly meaningful scenes but also to leave behind the emotions that had moved him initially to chose a particular subject. Even in this first series of pictures we see that picture-making for Rembrandt was a process by which he could both express and come to accept the often antisocial feelings that initiated the picture. Thus the complex content of the subjects chosen helped him to transcend his initial emotions. And through this whole activity he was creating works of art. Furthermore, these pictures then became important benchmarks of his personal odyssey that then stimulated new statements of his feelings.

Thus, Rembrandt early began a dialogue between his inner life and the resulting pictures. Some artists such as Dürer often chose to picture subject series, such as *The Life of the Virgin Mary.* Rembrandt instead created personal series--for example those pictures that deal with his life as an artist, those that deal with his family and those that deal with his being an artist within his family. Each complete picture became a statement of his feelings which he then reconsidered and often found that he had changed. In this way he was spurred on to his next picture.

CHAPTER 3
MASTER IN HIS STUDIO
1627,1628, 1629

Settled in his own place in 1627, the year he turned twenty-one, Rembrandt painted *St. Paul in Prison* (Br. 601). St. Paul sits on a book-strewn bed, musing on an epistle to a member of his far-flung congregation, so deep in thought that one shoe is on, one off. By highlighting his high-domed head and his writing hand with a brilliant patch of sunlight from an unseen window, Rembrandt subordinated the expertly drafted still-life objects to the apostle's intense, dedicated creation.

Like Paul with his manuscripts and writing tools, Rembrandt had what he needed: paints, brushes, wood for panels. His deep awareness of his private space affected both his choice of subject and the way he painted the pictures of this year. He emphasized voids as well as solids so that "space gains expressive life and becomes an inseparable part of the figures' existence," as Jacob Rosenberg noted.[1] Rembrandt expressed his pride in this painting by his dual signatures. In addition to signing it " R f " as he had the *St. Stephen* and several paintings of 1626, he wrote at the top of the page Paul holds in his hand: "REMBRANDT/Fecit."

The positive mood pervading the previous year's etching of *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Ba 59) and the *St. Paul* of this year did not last. In his dark *Flight into Egypt* (Ba 54) Joseph's back is

[1] Rosenberg, *Rembrandt*,308.

turned, Mary looks out crossly and even the ass seems worried. *The Money-Changer* (Br. 420) underlines this change. Although the picture resembles the *St. Paul* in its focus on a single old man surrounded by books, its expressive use of space and its subdued color scheme, the differences are telling. This man, almost enveloped in darkness, is isolated. Rather than signing *The Money-Changer* as he did the *St. Paul*, he signed it: RH, wishfully linking himself again with his family.

Now that he was on his own, he wanted and needed to support himself. The moneychanger scrutinizes a single coin by the light of a candle. Such intense concentration on one coin raises the question of whether Rembrandt was gaining any sales or commissions. Up to this time there are no indications in either his work or the documents to suggest that he had received any income.

The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Br. 535) provides evidence of Rembrandt's contact with his mother and signals a new burst of creativity. Rembrandt chose the moment after Simeon has blessed Jesus, when the Prophetess Anna "gave thanks likewise unto the Lord." As Kenneth Clark pointed out, Rembrandt, using a design taken from Raphael, has placed his mother, as Anna, at the apex of a triangle, smiling gently and holding out her hands in a gesture that conveys both surprise and benediction.[2]

Rembrandt's mother may have expressed just such a reaction when she looked at a large painting propped against the wall in her son's studio and suddenly realized it was a painting of St. Paul in prison. Her son who she had hoped would be a minister had become a persuasive Christian painter. Rembrandt transformed this moment

[2]Kenneth Clark, *Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Norton, 1968) 44-45.

with his mother into *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* to express his gratitude for his mother's vision and to rededicate himself to God, Jesus and to his art.

With a small painting on paper, *Christ at Emmaus* (Br. 539), he paid homage to his mother's enduring faith. Parallels between *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* and *Christ at Emmaus* noted by Schwartz suggest that Rembrandt recalled that earlier vision of revelation for which his mother modeled, as he painted *Christ at Emmaus*.[3]

In Luke's story of Emmaus, two disciples, forlorn after Jesus's death, meet a stranger whom they invite to eat with them. When he blesses and breaks bread, "their eyes were opened and they knew him." In the foreground of his painting Rembrandt painted the dark figure of a disciple kneeling next to Christ, while across the table an amazed disciple belatedly recognizes Jesus. In a small lighted background, however, he painted a toiling woman who does not turn around. The painting thus contrasts the disciples who require concrete proof and only then becomes enlightened to a woman in the background who continues to work in the light. He signs this painting RHL, linking himself both to his parentage and his home town. The woman in the *Emmaus* painting, like his mother, never lost faith, while the disciples, like Rembrandt, needed physical evidence of Christ's continued presence on the earth.

David Presenting the Head of Goliath to Saul (Br. 488) contains clues as to what revived Rembrandt's faith. This painting portrays a scene of sudden royal recognition and fits in with his continuing series on his life as an artist. Rembrandt includes within it the

[3] Schwartz, *Rembrandt*, 51.

now-familiar elements of a kneeling boy, elders, a cavalier horseman and soldiers with spears, also found in the *St. Stephen, the Baptism of the Eunuch* and *the History Painting.* This time the kneeling boy is David, an unknown who succeeds against great odds. And instead of the powerful elders being on a higher plane, they, the king, and the young man are on common ground. Abner, a beautifully robed patriarch, bends low to examine Goliath's head, and King Saul, puts out his hand to David in benediction.

This story of an obscure youth who becomes the King's favorite brings to mind a dramatic incident in Rembrandt's life so memorable that many years later Rembrandt will describe it to a particularly appreciative pupil, Samuel van Hoogstraaten, who will then pass it on to *his* pupil, Arnold Houbraken, who will call it "Rembrandt's brilliant beginning" in his book on painters of the Netherlands. According to Houbraken, certain art lovers "indicated to him a gentleman in the Hague to whom he should show and offer a picture which he had just finished."[4] Too poor to travel by stagecoach, Rembrandt walked the fourteen kilometers from Leiden to the Hague carrying his painting. When he sold the picture "for 100 florins," (more than four months wages for a cloth shearer),[5] he splurged by taking a stagecoach for the return trip. At the rest stop he alone stayed in the coach. Suddenly the horses bolted and gave him a wild ride back to Leiden.

The nearest to royalty in the Netherlands was the Prince of Orange, Frederick Hendrick, who resided and held court in the Hague. He was both commander in chief of the army for the United

[4] Houbraken, quoted in Goldscheider, *Rembrandt*, 25.

[5] Zumthor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*, 229.

Provinces and head of the States General, the governing body for the provinces Rembrandt included a hidden connection between the Prince and King Saul by borrowing the pose of one of the three kings from a Lucas Vosterman's print after a painting of *The Adoration of the Magi* by Rubens, the Prince's favorite painter.[6]

The Abner to the Prince's Saul, "the gentleman in the Hague" whom Houbraken mentions, was probably Constantijn Huygens, the Prince of Orange's secretary and art advisor, who purchased Rembrandt's *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* for the Prince's collection.[7] Rembrandt showed David actually kneeling before Abner, who responds by bowing low to David, a detail that dovetails with the idea that Huygens was the person who actually made the decision about the painting.

The exultant feeling of this little picture comes both from its subject and from the free way it is painted--an impressionistic impasto reminiscent of Frans Hals, far from Lastman's smooth, thin, handling of paint. Rembrandt, however, acknowledged Lastman by painting in the background a large structure similar to one in *Coriolanus*.[8] By portraying the archer on horseback higher than all the other figures and in a similar position to that of the Halsian man in *the History Painting*, Rembrandt expressed his esteem for Frans Hals's large group portrait dated the same year: 1627, *Banquet of the Officers of St. Joris-Doelen in Haarlem* (the Civic Guard of the Archers of St. George).[9]

His admiration for Hals' painting is illustrated too by the

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[6] Schwartz, *Rembrandt*, 61.

[7] Strauss, 87, 1632/3.

[8] Tümpel, *Pieter Lastman*, 125, no. 20.

[9] Claus Grimm, *Frans Hals* (New York: Abrams, 1990) 129, no. 33.

similarity between the technique which he used on this small panel and a description of Hals at work.

The Rembrandt Research Project team describes Rembrandt's rendering of the *David*:

> The execution is spontaneous, confident and rich in the sketchlike indication of shapes. The liveliness of the brushwork is maintained even in the background, where the paint is applied more thinly. Using mainly short and proportionately broad touches of the brush which never actually enter into details but which suggest postures, facial expressions and so on in a kind of shorthand, the scene has been painted wet-in-wet with a heavy impasto . . . . The massive horse on the left is painted very solidly and opaquely, with long brushstrokes that flow round the shapes.[10]

Contemporary witnesses described Hals's technique:

> He did not make preparative drawings, but started sketching the contours of his composition with brush and colour, laying at once the tones which served at the same time for the expression of volume and space, perspective, light, etc. Every brushstroke in his painting expresses at the same time relief, light, movement, material . . . . The brushstrokes themselves are constantly modulating. They start thick, become thin, and sometimes end thick again. Or they start thin to become thick, etc.[11]

On this small 27.2 by 39.6 centimeter panel Rembrandt could paint in Frans Hals' impressionistic style but despite his "royal recognition" he realized that Hals's achievement in his great canvas

[10] Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol.1, 129.

[11] N. S.Trivas, *Paintings of Frans Hals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941) 12.

of 179 by 257.5 centimeters towered far above everyone else. To symbolize that he was a beginner he portrayed King Saul blessing the kneeling David and a barking puppy, included a small self-portrait as an astonished curly-haired youth behind Saul and Abner, and signed this picture of triumph over almost impossible odds humbly, RH, (Rembrandt, Harmen's son).

A very early *Self-Portrait* (Br. 1) also dates from this period.[12] Alone with his image in the mirror, he was free to let the unanalyzed mixture of feelings within direct his eye and hand. He worked rapidly and intuitively. The resulting picture is alive with unusual spots of color and a bold use of the wooden tip of his brush to scratch through the paint to depict his curly hair. This vibrant youth with deeply shadowed wide-open eyes, both observant and dreaming, is directly accessible in all his uniqueness.

Perhaps because of his belief in the importance of deep and life-like emotions, Rembrandt was able to transmute himself onto the wooden panel. The unconscious information from his hand and eye thus becomes visible to both the viewer and Rembrandt himself. Therefore his self-portraits created good pictures that also provided him with a new method for discovering inner truths.

In the early part of 1628 Rembrandt, still twenty-one, gained his first apprentice, Gerritt Dou, the son of a glassmaker in Leiden. According to the Leiden biographer, Jan Orlers, Dou was apprenticed first to an engraver, next to a glass-painter and then

> his father took him into his own shop, where he practiced glass-cutting and glass-making, as a service and great

[12] This painting is rejected by the Rembrandt Research Project team as a copy of the painting we discuss on page 70-71. See Bruyn et al., vol 1, 170, copy 1 for comments.

> benefit to his father. However, because he was so foolhardy in the installation of glass . . . fearing that an accident might happen on the high ladders, his father--although grateful--decided to stop having him pursue the glass-making craft, and to instead apprentice him for the sake of learning the art of painting. And accordingly, he brought him on 14 February of the year 1628, aged fifteen, to the artful and esteemed Mr. Rembrant.[13]

Being a master with a talented apprentice changed Rembrandt's life. Instead of portraying the absorbed isolated activity of a single figure such as he had done in the *St. Paul* and *The Money Changer*, he began to picture pairs of colleagues. In *Two Scholars Disputing* (Br. 423) learned patriarchs confer over a passage in a book. The painting suggests that Rembrandt respected his pupil, despite his youth and inexperience, and considered him an associate in their mutual pursuit of further understanding. Rembrandt's dedication to teaching art with its involvement in mental sharing and the transfer of skills from the master's hands to those of the apprentice is symbolized in *Two Scholars Disputing*. He portrays the elder colleague making a point to the younger one and paints the hands centrally located and strongly lit.

In addition to this painting that reflects Rembrandt, the teacher, he also created another large etching of a size similar to his first two etchings. *Peter and John at the Temple Gate* (Ba 95) illustrates the passage from Acts in which the two disciples, about to enter "the temple which is called Beautiful," are asked for alms by a paralyzed man.

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[13] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 219, 1641/9.

> Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. Acts 3: 1-9

Again Rembrandt stressed the mutuality of their undertaking by portraying the pair as *disciples*. The size of this etching suggests that Rembrandt spent money on this copper plate to celebrate his first pupil. His lack of additional sales after his spectacular one to the Prince of Orange is reflected, however, in his choice of Peter, who has neither gold nor silver, and his frequent depiction of beggars this year. The figure of Peter is even based on one of his drawings of beggars, *Old man with His Arms Extended* (Be. 12, Sl. 275). Like Peter with young John, Rembrandt, still poor but with young Dou at his side, hoped to heal Art as he considered it was then, a figurative cripple at the gate of the Temple Beautiful.

In both of these pictures Rembrandt expressed his belief that teaching his pupil Dou would benefit both his own understanding of art and his capacity to make art that would contribute to their chosen field, Art.

Now that he was a master with his own apprentice, Rembrandt also began to think about the great continuity of Art. *An Artist in His Studio* (Br. 419) conveys his conception of the individual artist's place in this evolving process. Facing the large, dark easel in the foreground, the painter looks very small: "*ars longa, vita brevis*," i. e., Art is immortal, while the life of each artist is short. Yet there

would be no Art without artists. The easel requires a painter.

Rembrandt portrays the artist far back from the easel, contemplating what he will paint. Thus, as Chapman has noted, Rembrandt illustrated van Manders' advice in *Het Schilder-boek* that the first step in creating a picture should be the imaginative conception of the work. It is only after that internal process that the artist should actually begin to paint.[14]

An Artist in His Studio displays the various tools that Dou's master will teach his pupil how to use and illustrates the proper ways to handle them. The easel in the foreground is a good, solid, wooden one, with pegs which permit a wide variety of height adjustments and with moveable top and bottom cross pieces to hold wood panels of any size securely. On the wall is a large, clean, wooden palette--a reminder of the importance of cleaning the palette thoroughly after finishing a painting, in readiness for the next one. The artist holds one brush in his right hand and the others in his left hand. His left thumb grasps the palette; the first three fingers hold the reserve brushes and the maulstick is balanced through his little finger. The maulstick's end is padded so that the artist can rest it against a dry part of the panel to steady his hand for painting such details as those Rembrandt included in this philosophical and practical illustration of his craft.

Another task was to demonstrate the actual process of painting, showing Dou the successive stages that various works undergo. The outcome of one such lesson may be his *Self-Portrait* (A 14),[15] probably created by Rembrandt copying his *Self-Portrait*

[14] H. Perry Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 84.

[15] Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol. 1, 170.

(Br.1). As he painted the self-portrait again for Dou he changed his dreamy look to one of concentration, removed such crude elements as the light splotch on the neck and fashioned his curly hair more carefully with the wooden end of the brush than in his first self-portrait, creating, however, a less intense, immediate expression.

Even with his new responsibilities of teaching an apprentice, he found time to create etchings of his mother. She sat twice for etched portraits on which he worked with delicate care. The different states of these etchings testify to the time he spent pulling prints, then reworking the plates further, adding more details, before signing them RHL (Rembrandt, son of Harmen of Leiden) and dating them. The resulting portraits are both realistic and loving; particularly affectionate is *Rembrandt's Mother* (Ba. 354, 2nd state). Neeltgen van Suydbrouck was about sixty at the time her youngest son portrayed her in these etchings. She had already lived a long, work-filled life in which she had borne ten children, three of whom died in infancy.[16]

Both Rembrandt's realistic depiction of his mother and her willingness to pose indicate that prettiness and youth were not virtues and ideals for either mother or son. He honored signs of age and hard work, lovingly etching her wrinkled, careworn face. Although part of the reason why he used her as a model may have been her availability, these etchings attest to their mutual affection, respect and admiration. Now that he was an esteemed master with his own studio, he could freely express his love for her without jeopardizing his independence. The resulting etchings are his most skilled to date.

[16] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 35, 1589/4.

Rembrandt also etched four small self-portraits, quick studies in which he portrayed himself as very boyish, with his bushy head of curly hair expressive of intense vitality. In one of these, *Rembrandt with a Broad Nose* (Ba. 4), he looks directly at himself. Rembrandt's concentration on his own face was already yielding him more than an inexpensive means of learning how to portray various expressions. After he looked in the mirror and applied oil paints on wood or followed through the processes involved in etching, he discovered what his hand had revealed. Accepting what he found out about himself, he then was free to move on. What would become a lifetime of self-portraits bear witness to his continuing interest in knowing himself.

In Dou's second year of apprenticeship, Rembrandt put his self-awareness to work, using what could otherwise have become an ugly emotional situation. Despite his youth, Dou had already created several paintings that often have been incorrectly attributed to his master. That year Rembrandt, instead of painting colleagues, painted *David Playing the Harp Before Saul* (Br. 490), which illustrates the part in the story where David, King Saul's well-loved armor-bearer, became so successful and popular that "the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand; and David played."

Rembrandt's painting captures Saul's buried animosity at the moment when he "wants to smite David even to the wall with the javelin." The Rembrandt Research Project team notes that Saul's fist "placed exactly at the central axis of the painting" has "an independent three-dimensional existence."[17] The concreteness and

[17] Bruyn, et al., *Corpus*, 1, 262.

centrality of Saul's fist express both Rembrandt's ambition and his hidden antagonism toward Dou. As often occurs in his work, the man with the hand-held implement symbolizes the artist. And the clenched fist says that Rembrandt, like Saul, did not want to be bested by anyone.

Thanks to the widespread use of biblical stories as subjects for paintings and to Rembrandt's ability to find the one that fitted his current feelings, he could use his envy to enliven the *Saul and David* rather than allow it to impede his creativity and his teaching. Indeed, painting the picture could be both the means to teach further skills to his pupil and then, with its recognisable biblical subject, a painting for an art patron to buy.

While Dou was moving rapidly toward what would become a very successful career in Leiden, Rembrandt was still struggling to make a living in his hometown. During the previous year he had made three etchings of beggars, while in this year of 1629, nine of his fifteen etchings were of the down-and-out. Rembrandt's large *Beggar in High Cap, Leaning on Stick* (Ba. 162) illustrates his empathic view of the poor. His beggars are individual human beings with dignity and spirit. This old man, with his eyes almost closed and his mouth set, has obviously suffered greatly. Rembrandt's portrayal of beggars contrasts with that of a contemporary etcher, Jacques Callot. Callot's beggars confront us with their "otherness," asking for a handout, while Rembrandt's beggars are so sympathetic that we participate in their plight: We too might be destitute.

In this year of no known commissions and many etchings of beggars, instead of letting wealthy patrons dictate what he should

paint and how, he kept himself from temptation by painting *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* (Br. 539 A), a powerful warning against the betrayal of one's beliefs for monetary gain. He illustrated Matthew 28: 1-5:

> Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innnocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.

With this portrayal of the tormented Judas kneeling and thrusting the money away, Rembrandt strengthened his resolve to maintain his principles.

Most likely Constantijn Huygens, who advised Prince Frederick Hendrick to buy *Presentation in the Temple*, was Rembrandt's tempter. Huygens' strong feelings about how Rembrandt and another young Leiden artist, Jan Lievens, should proceed with their artistic development comes through clearly in Huygens' manuscript which was only discovered in modern times. This influential nobleman recorded the following in his autobiography:

> Oh, if only they [Rembrandt and Jan Lievens] were acquainted with Raphael and Michelangelo. They would eagerly visually devour so many monuments of these great souls. How quickly they would surpass them all and, as men born for the consummation of art (did they only realize it), they would summon Italians to their own Holland. But I will not be silent about the pretext by which they usually hide how much it is a matter of apathy, and excuse themselves. They say that in the bloom of their youth, when especially

> an account of themselves must be given, there is not leisure time to waste in travel. Besides, as there is today an eager delight in and choice of paintings by kings and princes on this side of the Alps, they have seen Italian paintings especially outside of Italty, which there you track down with great inconvenience scattered about, while here they are displayed *en masse* and one can have his fill.[18]

Huygens' mixture of enthusiastic support, strong-minded insistence on a stay in Italy as the only way to become a great artist, and withering attitude toward their objections might have been persuasive, especially if Huygens combined it with an offer to support a trip to Italy. But Rembrandt who had much earlier chosen to become an artist rather than go to the university was not dissuaded from his own direction. He signed his *Judas* "RHL", identifying himself with his home town as did Lucas van Leyden, who never went to Italy either.[19]

Even though the *Judas* probably was a reaction by Rembrandt to Huygens' insistence on the necessity for a journey to Italy and his willingness to pay for it, when Huygens saw the *Judas* he waxed enthusiastic:

> I want to say that Rembrandt's finest painting is the one of the penitent Judas returning the silver coins, the price of the innocent Lord, to the high priest. All of Italy, and whatever of beauty or deserving admiration that has survived from furthest antiquity may [only] approach it. The gesture of this one Judas in despair--not to speak of the many [other] fascinating figures in this one work--

[18] Strauss, 72, 1630/5

[19] Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters.* (from the first edition of the *Schilder-boek* 1603-04), ed. Hessel Miedema (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1994) vol.1, Fol. 212 v, 109.

> Judas, maddened, howling, begging forgiveness, yet not hoping for it, or reflecting any hope in his countenance, his expression frightening, his hair tangled, his clothes torn, his limbs twisted, his hands clenched to the point of blood, prostrate on his knees on a random impulse, his body twisted by every pitiful hideousness--this bearing I contrast to all the elegance of the centuries and one that I want the most unaware mortals to know. This latter group asserts, and we have reproached them at other times, that nothing today is either accomplished or spoken that antiquity did not see accomplished or said long ago. But I say that it did not occur to Protogenes, Apelles or Parthasius nor could it occur were they to return, how this adolescent (I am amazed just reporting it), this Dutchman, this miller without a beard has summed up individual elements in one human being and expressed what is universal. Blessed are you my Rembrandt! Ilium and all of Asia were not carried to Italy for as much as the highest praise of Greece and Italy has been brought to Holland by this Dutchman, who till now has seldom left the confines of his city.[20]

Again we see how Rembrandt was able to take his potentially destructive feelings and through a process of melding them into a well-known biblical story, create a powerful picture that even moves the very person with whom Rembrandt could have been in direct conflict--Huygens. Huygens' strong praise, however, did not lead him to purchase the *Judas*. Since Rembrandt did not see Huyghens' autobiography, he may not even have known that Huygens considered the painting extraordinary.

What painting the *Judas* made clear to Rembrandt was that he had to develop a way to support himself without betraying his

[20] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 71, 1630/5.

beliefs. He thus started to train himself for portraiture, the "bread and butter" of Dutch artists. He began to paint a new type of self-portrait, carefully finished and formal. These self-portraits both honed and demonstrated his skills in the lucrative field of portrait painting. In himself, Rembrandt found a patient, cooperative model, available whenever he felt like working, who gladly took the needed pose and who did not cost him money. He made a surprising discovery with these self-portraits: each time he looked in the mirror, he found a new self. In one of these self-portraits he is an aristocratic, sensitive, slightly effete young prince *Self-Portrait* (Br. 8). In another an upright young man, a son to make a mother proud *Self-portrait* (Br. 6). And to develop skills for etched portrait commissions, he etched *Rembrandt Bareheaded: Bust, Roughly Etched* (Ba 338), the serious Dutch artist sitting for his portrait in his good clothes. In this, his largest portrait etching to date, he tried using a double etching needle to mimic brushstrokes.

He also continued to paint, etch, and draw less formal expressive self-portraits, including a bold drawing with half his face in intense shadow *Self-portrait* (Be. 53, Sl. 269), using both pen with bistre and brush with India ink. How eager and young he looks! His eyes are open wide; his lips about to speak. He conveyed his inner life at a particular moment whenever he looked in the mirror and set down what he saw.

Rembrandt had another model close at hand, this year and the next, whom he often portrayed--his father, who had appeared only once before, in *Tobit and Anna*. His absence from Rembrandt's work is hardly surprising considering a miller's long hours. A wind-

powered mill operates whenever the breeze comes up, day or night. A miller, like a sailor, has to gauge the wind to trim the sails for maximum power. Yet his vessel is permanently at quayside, constantly being loaded and unloaded. Each load in or out has to be weighed and entered into the ledgers. Rembrandt's father, at sixty-one, probably began as a miller's apprentice at the age of seven. He had thus put in about fifty-four years of hard work. Now, in failing health, he stayed at home. Rembrandt sketched him in red chalk seated in a chair. With his inward-looking eyes and long flowing beard, he began to resemble St. Paul. Rembrandt added a black ink wash to the foreground to emphasize the great open book at St. Paul's elbow. Then copying the drawing onto an etching plate, he outlined the book more clearly and put a pen in Paul's hand to create the sombre *St. Paul in Meditation* (Ba. 149).

Probably by the latter part of 1629 Rembrandt began to worry that his father was failing. Thinking about his father's deteriorating condition, his son recalled the imagery of "a great destruction" in the book of Jeremiah:

> The lion is come up from his thicket and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he has gone forth from his place to make the land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant (Jeremiah 4:6-7)

Rembrandt then etched *The Small Lion Hunt: One Lion* (Ba. 116) which shows a lion attacking a man who still clings to a fallen horse. Nearby another man on horseback rides in close to the lion with a sword raised over his head. The felled rider may yet be saved.

CHAPTER 4
LEIDEN AND AMSTERDAM
1630, 1631

During these next two years Rembrandt probably spent time in both Leiden and Amsterdam. The final section of Orlers' biography of Rembrandt is relevant here:

> He was so talented that he has since become one of the most esteemed painters of this century. And because his work and art had greatly pleased and impressed the citizens and residents of Amsterdam, and because he received frequent portrait commissions, as well as requests for other pictures, he decided to move from Leiden to Amsterdam. Accordingly he left here in about 1630 and took up residence there, and is still living there in the year 1641.[1]

Orlers makes it clear that it was Amsterdam rather than Leiden that appreciated Rembrandt's ability and gave him commissions. Rembrandt thus had to move to Amsterdam to support himself. Orlers, however, was premature as to when Rembrandt moved to Amsterdam. Both the pictorial and documentary evidence indicate that Rembrandt lived in Leiden during 1630, but probably made trips to Amsterdam.

In the early part of 1630 Rembrandt's father continued to decline, while Rembrandt became increasingly capable. Rather than withdrawing because of this painful contrast, Rembrandt sat

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[1] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 216,219, 1641 / 8.

patiently with his father day after day, making pictures and keeping him company as he watched him sink slowly. And his father, even as he weakened, must have appreciated the companionship of his son. In this period Rembrandt painted a worn and exhausted *Apostle Paul at his Desk* (Br. 602), recording his father's worsening health since last year's etching of St. Paul.

Around the same time, Constantijn Huygens' praise of Rembrandt's work bore fruit. Prince Frederick Hendrick gave Lord Ancrum, Sir Robert Kerr, who was visiting the Netherlands on a diplomatic mission for King Charles I of England, paintings by both Rembrandt and Lievens to present to the English king. Probably during the early part of 1630 Rembrandt completed *Rembrandt's Mother* (Br. 70), called in the King's inventory "an old woeman with a greate Scarfe."[2] Her eyes look deeply inward and her mouth pulled in and down expresses controlled suffering. An X-ray of this picture shows her facing a hidden image of an old man with a sunken face and a long beard,[3] probably a representation of her husband. By including his father in the underpainting of this picture for Charles I, Rembrandt evidently acknowledged how concerned his mother was about her husband and also privately made his father part of this painting for the King of England.

The painting techniques used in *Rembrandt's Mother* are sufficiently different from Rembrandt's usual methods to make the the Rembrandt Research Project team in Volume II question their acceptance of *Rembrandt's Mother* in Volume I. They report that in no other paintings of these years "can there be found a complete

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[2] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 179, 1639 / 11.

[3] Bruyn et al., *Corpus* , vol. 1, 317.

analogy to the modelling of the face" and that the painter used a large amount of grey, which was not usual for Rembrandt.[4] They reject two other paintings of this year for this same use of small dabs of grey paint. By rejecting these paintings, they ignore the evidence for Rembrandt altering his techniques to fit particular expressive needs. As will be described in more detail later, during this period of his father's decline and death Rembrandt used more grey and this different method for laying on paint for several other pictures.

In the same inventory of Charles I collection is a Rembrandt *Self-portrait* (Br. 12) "the picture done by Rembrant, being his owne picture & done by himself in a Black capp and furrd habbitt with a little goulden chaine uppon both his Should[rs]." [5] Like his mother, Rembrandt is introspective, though less intensely so than she is. His mouth is softer giving him a more hopeful expression.

Just as Rembrandt had a hidden underpainting in his painting of his mother that would be given to King Charles I, he also included an underpainting in his own self-portrait. But this underpainting is quite different as it concerns his awareness of his own destiny. Under the portrait for King Charles of a young and diffident young man albeit with furred habit and golden chain is a dark figure whose pose recalls the black king in the print after Rubens' *Adoration of the Magi*[6] from which he had previously used the pose of another of the three kings for Saul in *David Presenting the Head of Goliath to Saul*. Thus a still-hidden king brings his gifts to King Charles I.

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[4] Bruyn, et al., *Corpus*, vol. 2, 839.

[5] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents* 179,

[6] Schwartz, *Rembrandt*, 61.

This underpainting makes it likely that in his own mind Rembrandt considered himself an equal of King Charles I of England. Of course this hidden connection of himself to a king was only for himself, a kind of inner affirmation that would help him become what he wanted to be.

Rembrandt also included in this painting another indication of his belief in his future eminence. He placed his image within a circle that extends beyond the edges of the painting, thus alluding to a famous story about Giotto mentioned both in Vasari's *Lives of Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, and in van Mander's *Schilder-boek*. According to this story, Giotto sent only a single red circle drawn freehand to the Pope, "wherefore the Pope and many courtiers that were versed in the arts recognized by this how much Giotto surpassed in excellence all the other painters of his time."[7] Although the reference to Giotto is more visible than the underpainting, it is unlikely that Rembrandt expected anyone other than himself to make such a connection. Again, like the underpainting, it was another private assertion of his place in history.

Rembrandt turned from the paintings for King Charles back to the reality of his dying father. He etched another lion hunt, carrying the story further than the one he had made last last year. In *The Small Lion Hunt: Two Lions* (Ba. 115) the man's horse has thrown him, leaving him at the mercy of a lionness whose paws scratch his face, her jaws at his chest, while a horseman who is trying to spear her is kept at bay by a young lion.

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[7] *Vasari's Lives of the Artists*, ed. Betty Burroughs (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946) 18.

Rembrandt's etching combines the metaphor of the lion as grim reaper in *Jeremiah* with details of the accounts from travelers returning from Africa who reported that a lioness with her young was the most dangerous of all beasts. *The Small Lion Hunt: Two Lions* symbolizes dying as a process of being destroyed by ravaging natural forces, a conflict that the loved one and his supporters are bound to lose.

During this same period Rembrandt began a *Raising of Lazarus*, praying that his father, like Lazarus, would be brought back to life, only to change the drawing into an *Entombment of Christ* (Be. 17, Sl. 103), which he dated 1630. On April 27, 1630 his father was buried in Pieterskerk, Leiden,[8] the church where he and his wife were married forty-one years earlier.[9] After the death of his father Rembrandt painted *Self-Portrait* (Br. 9), an unassuming miller's son, quite similar to the self-portrait *Rembrandt with a Broad Nose* he etched before his father's illness, two years earlier. The style he used to produce this almost unchanged outer appearance is so atypical that the Rembrandt Research Project team consider this self-portrait an "imitation of uncertain date".[10] Yet the X-ray underpainting of the self-portrait reveals a very dark, expressionist self-portrait, a stricken self. His brow is furrowed. His eyes stare out. His nose is bulbous, flattened and foreshortened, his jaw elongated, his mouth open. His body is partially turned away. His hand, with brilliant swirling light behind it, is clenched, the fingers turned inward against his chest. This portrait of a man in terrible

[8] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 66, 1630 / 1.

[9] Ibid., 35, 1589 / 4.

[10] Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol. 1, 647-8.

torment is an unlikely first step for an imitator to undertake. But it makes perfect sense if Rembrandt, full of intense and frantic grief, looked in the mirror after his father's death and found almost the same physical self as before.

After he gave visual form to his intense suffering in the distorted portrait of the underpainting and then confronted it, he evidently began, haltingly, to reconstruct an outward self over that face of despair. He covered over his grief-distorted image by painting small, separate dabs of grey again and again. With the repetitive motion and bland color he moved to the accepting, rather dazed look of this quiet self-portrait, so unlike his self-portraits of last year with their complexity, sophistication, imaginative identity shifts, and subtle hints of greatness.

The techniques that the research team cite in rejecting the self-portrait as a "Rembrandt" seem appropriate to Rembrandt's emotional state: the fusing rather than separation of shadow and light, the frequent use of grey paint, the small brush strokes, and the failure to delimit form.[11] The undifferentiated greyness of the background of *Self-Portrait* (Br. 9) and his signature : "RL", Rembrandt of Leiden, a monogram that no longer included his father, are further indications that this painting expresses his grief over his father's death. He signed two small etchings of himself the same way. In both the expression in his eyes is pained, sorrowful, and vulnerable as he faced a future without his father.

Rembrandt's lonely suffering gave way to a period of mourning that permeates a number of his pictures. In a dream-like, nocturnal

[11] Ibid, 647-8.

pen and brush study *Rembrandt's Family Listening of a Reading* (Be.52, Sl.158), a woman reads, while a young boy looks over at her with concern; a dark figure off to the right, who casts no shadow, is also reading. This family group is an imaginative depiction of Rembrandt's own: he, again a young boy, watches his mother, his father with them in spirit. They are together in the act of reading from the Great Book. In Rembrandt's life the Bible reinforced the deep personal faith his parents transmitted to him, a faith that sustained him and enabled him to work even during his bereavement.

Rembrandt had already considered passages in Jeremiah when he etched the two *Lion Hunts*. Now that he wanted to embody his feelings at his father's death in a major painting, he found his inspiration in Jeremiah's lament:

> Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment . . .
> I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light.
> I beheld the mountains, and lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly.
> I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled.
> I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities there were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger.
> For thus has the Lord said,
> The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end.
> For this shall the earth mourn and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it.(Jeremiah 4: 20,28)

Meditating on these lines, Rembrandt painted *The Prophet Jeremiah Mourning over the Destruction of Jerusalem* (Br. 604) and signed it RHL 1630. Sorrowing, surrounded by darkness on one side and ruin on the other, Jeremiah can foresee what will befall but is powerless to avert it. Thinking of his father and identifying with Jeremiah's grief, Rembrandt created a masterwork that epitomizes human vulnerability and mortality.

Rembrandt also portrayed his father in a painting which he signed RHL 1630, *Rembrandt's Father* (Br. 76) in which his father looks as he did before he became seriously ill, but has on a Kolpak, a hat worn by old Polish Jews. What the significance of this hat was to Rembrandt has yet to be deciphered. He first covered the whole panel with a priming layer of white lead.[12] When he rendered his father over this background he left a little of the brilliance shining through, perhaps symbolic of heavenly radiance.

Finally Rembrandt gives thanks to his heavenly Father for the presence of his earthly father during his youth with three small, beautiful etchings of Christ's early years in each of which an old man is present, *The Circumcision: Small Plate* (Ba. 48), *The Presentation in the Temple: Small Plate* (Ba. 51) and *Christ Disputing with the Doctors: Small Plate* (Ba. 66).

Rembrandt was not completely preoccupied with his father's dying and his death during this year. He also thought about love and its risks. Since 1628 he had been working and reworking a painting that he completed this year portraying a destructive woman *Samson and Delilah* (Br. 489). Samson sleeps with his face hidden in

[12] Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol. 1, 287,289.

Delilah's lap while she beckons the man who will cut off the source of Samson's strength, his hair. The soldier who will then capture Samson is just coming around the corner. After finishing this painting of a woman who destroys a man's strength and power Rembrandt began to portray women in a more favorable light. Two etchings of women placed in 1630 reveal a mixture of attraction and repulsion. *The White Negress* (Ba. 357) peers suspiciously out of the corner of her eye, while *Diana at the Bath* (Ba 201) is portrayed with such prosaic realism that she is uninviting. Yet Rembrandt's decision to etch Diana, the goddess of virgins, whom artists have traditionally used as the symbol of chaste and beautiful womanhood, nevertheless indicates interest.

A painting of this year, however, introduces a very different point of view towards a woman. In *Andromeda* (Br. 462) a man-god wants to rescue a woman. The story Rembrandt chose is a very romantic one from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a classic taught in Latin school. Perseus, the son of Jove, the child begotten on Danae in the golden rain, was flying over Ethiopia when he saw:

> Andromeda,
> Bound by the arms to the rough rocks; her hair,
> Stirred in a gentle breeze, and her warm tears flowing
> Proved her not marble, as he thought, but woman.
> She was beautiful, so much so that he almost
> Forgot to move his wings. He came down to her
> Saying: "My dear, the chains that ought to bind you
> Are love-knots rather than shackles." [13]

[13] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955) 103.

Rembrandt chose to paint Perseus' story, a hero who falls in love and wants to rescue a woman, not avoid her. Clearly the fear of a Delilah had left him. In fact if we take Rembrandt's choice of subject seriously, we have to consider that Perseus's bold declaration of binding a woman with love-knots rather than shackles might well be Rembrandt's too. Reading this picture as we have past pictures suggests that Rembrandt had already found a woman whom he felt was "chained" whom he wanted to free.

There is one aspect of Rembrandt's painting which does not seem consistent with Ovid's poem. In the story Perseus immediately falls in love with Andromeda, whom he considers very beautiful. Rembrandt, however, painted Adromeda's body more objectively than one would expect. Perhaps this is an outcome of his requirement that Nature should be his only guide and up to this point in his life he has not yet had the opportunity to see a woman whom he loves without clothes on. Nonetheless his *Andromeda* is probably a private statement of his love and desire for a particular woman, a woman whom he plans to free from her chains.

With his new interest in an Andromeda, Rembrandt's dismal financial prospects gall him particularly. Even though his paintings were in the collections of Prince Frederick Hendrick and King Charles I, he had few other sales. To "bind a woman with love-knots" usually requires a man to have a secure, substantial income. However there is no evidence that Rembrandt was receiving commissions yet, despite his readying himself for portrait painting.

He expressed his pain and frustration in one of his etchings of this year of 1630 *Rembrandt Open-Mouthed, as if Shouting* (Ba. 13).

He also made eight etchings of indigents. Even more tellingly one of them is a self-portrait as a pained and angry beggar (Ba. 174). With his hand cupped and his mouth open, this scowling, crouching figure seems to be crying out. Unlike Rembrandt's other beggars, this one looks in real pain. Throughout these years Rembrandt's depiction of beggars has suggested that he felt a similarity between their state and his own. This self-portrait no longer identifies him *with* beggars, but *as* one.

Rembrandt had stayed as long as he could in Leiden. By the end of 1630 it was clear that he could not make a living there. He would have to move Amsterdam. Probably he did not actually move to Amsterdam until the latter part of 1631 but he must have begun to receive lucrative portrait commissions quite early in 1631.

Very soon the beggar Rembrandt became a dandy who celebrated his riches with a self-portrait etching, *Rembrandt in Soft Hat and Embroidered Coat* (Ba. 7). Even before his twenty-fifth birthday in July he proudly inscribed several copies of the second state of this etching with his age of 24, the year, and his signature: Rembrandt f., probably to give as gifts. He was so pleased with the continued improvement in his financial situation that he kept revising this self-portrait, increasing his finery through each of nine states.

He had to leave Leiden for Amsterdam to become successful. The Amsterdamers' enthusiastic support of his carefully-honed portrait skills immediately inspired him. One of his earliest commissions, *A Young Man at a Desk* (Br. 146) has the directness of a candid snapshot. Interrupted in the midst of making notes from a

long manuscript, the young man turns with his mouth opens slightly, about to speak to the viewer. But it is with his large, impressive portrait of *The Amsterdam Merchant Nicholaes Ruts* (Br.145) that he clearly surpasses his contemporaries to garner such modern praise as:

> The general effect of the picture is overwhelming; the dazzle of the fur, the infinitely complex play of subdued light and shade, all of which is subordinated to the character of the man, make mysterious the technique by which the Ilusion was created.[14]
>
> The manner of painting is remarkable for its great decisiveness and power. . . . The spatial composition is extremely complex and subtle for a Dutch portrait of the early 1630s.[15]

Rembrandt expressed his gratitude to Ruts for this early commission by taking special care with every aspect of this portrait. He even chose for the support a piece of rare and valuable wood, mahogany from a single plank. But he did not idealize his sitter. He portrayed him with respect, a dignified well-to-do man whose face shows lines of age and responsibility and whose magnificent clothes proclaim his lucrative business, the Russian fur trade. The dramatic way Ruts reaches out toward the viewer, holding a slip of paper signed with the artist's monogram, RHL, suggests that Rembrandt was aware that the picture would hang in the Amsterdam store owned by Ruts's married daughter Susanna,

[14] Christopher Wright, *Rembrandt and his Art* (New York: Galahead, 1975) 21.

[15] Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol.1, 117, 119.

who ran a successful business selling textiles.[16] Although the three lines of writing on the note have yet to be deciphered, *The Amsterdam Merchant Nicholaes Ruts* was itself a letter of introduction for Rembrandt to potential patrons in Amsterdam. We should note that at this early point in his portrait-painting in Amsterdam he was still signing himself RHL, Rembrandt Harmen's son, Leiden.

Rembrandt's most likely link to Ruts was through Hendrick van Uylenburgh, an Amsterdam art dealer with ties to Leiden through close relatives[17] and to Ruts' family through the Mennonite religious community to which Uylenburgh belonged. By June of this year Rembrandt's and van Uylenburgh's business relationship was so well established that a notary records Rembrandt as having loaned the art dealer one thousand guilders, probably in the form of paintings valued at that amount rather than cash.[18] Thus Rembrandt consigned to van Uylenburgh many of his unsold paintings.

Although Rembrandt's portrait commissions required him to go to Amsterdam frequently, he evidently maintained his residence in Leiden for the first half of 1631. His first known expenditure of his recently earned money confirms his continued close ties to Leiden and to his mother. On March 1,"the master painter, Mr. Rembrandt Harmansz van Ryn" bought a "well-situated garden [plot] located outside the Wittepoort of the city of Leiden" that bordered on his mother's land "for the sum of 500 carolus guilders."[19] Evidently

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[16] Schwartz, *Rembrandt*,146.

[17] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 61-62, 1628 / 2.

[18] Ibid.,75-76, 1631 / 4.

[19] Ibid.,74, 1631 / 1.

Rembrandt felt that his mother would enjoy this garden plot. Despite his commitments in Amsterdam, he also devoted time to portraying her. In his etching *Rembrandt's Mother Seated in an Oriental Headdress* (Ba. 348), she has the bearing of an ancient seer. It is possible that the headdress she is wearing is a gift from her newly well-to-do son.

Rembrandt also sat with and pictured his eldest brother, Gerrit. Again, as he had during his father's final illness, he kept his brother company. As though to compensate for the fact that his financial success came too late to give real pleasure to his brother who had modelled faithfully for his younger brother through the years, he etched Gerrit (Ba. 263) looking ill but dressed in an embroidered coat similar to the one in which he portrayed himself. Gerrit was buried in Pieterskerk on September 23.[20] He then immortalized Gerrit in one of his earliest half-length paintings (Br. 81) endowing him with the outward signs of dignity and importance, dressed in a gorget, a piece of neck armor, with a feather in his hat, and a gold chain and a medal.

When Rembrandt moved to Amsterdam later in 1631, he left behind not only his mother but also his first apprentice, Gerrit Dou, who would become a very successful Leiden master.[21] *A Young Man in a Plumed Hat* (Br. 143) is probably Rembrandt's farewell portrait of Dou. Rembrandt expressed his high regard for his pupil much as he did for his brother, by painting a large feather in his cap and a well-wrought gold chain and pendant around his neck. X-rays reveal that Rembrandt also recorded for himself how much Dou had matured

[20] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 78, 1631 / 8.

[21] Ibid., 218, 1641 / 9.

by painting this portrait over one of a younger Dou, who dressed more simply and held his head less confidently.[22]

Probably before his move to Amsterdam Rembrandt painted three identically-sized small paintings that display his technical skills and also privately expressed his sense of prosperity, *Self-portrait* (Br. 11), *Rembrandt's Mother*, (Br. 63) and *A Man Laughing* (Br. 134). Underneath each of these demonstrations of painting techniques is a secret symbol of his newly gained affluence: a layer of gold leaf attached to the copper support. When the research team at the Mauritshuis museum which owns *A Man Laughing* searched, they found no other examples of applying gold leaf to the copper as the layer on which to paint.[23] Rembrandt was not as rich as Croesus nor could he pave the streets with gold, but he felt flush enough to cover three small copper plates with gold, for his eyes alone. With these small pictures Rembrandt also demonstrated the technical versatility with which he was already dazzling Amsterdam by using three different techniques for the these portraits. According to the Mauritshuis research team:

> The painting in the *Study of a Man Laughing* (Br. 134) is remarkable by reason of the strokes and touches of the brush, which seem to have been applied rapidly and with great assurance. As for the small portrait representing *Rembrandt's Mother* (Br. 63) it has been executed in far greater detail, while the brushwork in the *Self-portrait* (Br. 11) is much more delicate.[24]

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[22] Bruyn, *Corpus*, vol.1, 385.

[23] A.B. Vries, Magdi Toth-Ubbens, W. Frontjes *Rembrandt in the Mauritshuis* (The Hague: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1978) 53.

[24] Ibid., 53.

He probably gave his mother the self-portrait and took with him the small studies that emphasize his contrasting techniques and also recall the two surviving members of his family with whom he felt close, his mother and his brother Adriaan, whom the laughing young man resembles.

Rembrandt's success as an artist came faster than success as a lover. He painted a figure of *Christ on the Cross* (Br. 543A) that echoes last year's *Rembrandt, Open-Mouthed as if Shouting* (Ba. 13).[25] Moreover, the twist of Christ's body on the cross is so reminiscent of a ninth-century *Andromeda* in the Leiden University Library that, as Schwartz writes "There can be no doubt that Andromeda was on his mind when he painted his own picture of *Christ on the Cross* in 1631.[26] Evidently when Rembrandt, like Perseus, tried to win his Andromeda and bind her with love, he was rejected. He further expressed his pain this year in his etching *Rembrandt in a Heavy Fur Cap* (Ba.16) where he looks worried and hunched-over.

Even though Rembrandt endowed his *Christ on the Cross* with personal feeling, he probably did not initiate the idea of painting it. H. Perry Chapman offers a plausible suggestion that takes into account that Rembrandt's rival, Jan Lievens, also painted a *Christ on the Cross* this year and that both Rembrandt's and Lievens's compositions derive from an engraving by Pontius, published in the same year of 1631, of a Rubens *Christ on the Cross.* Chapman suggests that Constantijn Huygens, in the spirit of the Renaissance *combattimento,* had the two young painters he most admired each make a painting based on Pontius' engraving, with the winner to

[25] Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits,* 19.

[26] Schwartz, *Rembrandt,* 121.

receive a commission from Prince Frederick Hendrick for a Passion series.[27]

Rembrandt's capacity to use his torment to animate his *Christ on the Cross* enabled him to best his rival and win the Prince's commission. Probably it is this prestigious award that revitalized his hopes of gaining the woman he loved, his Andromeda. A year ago Rembrandt seen through the eyes of the type of woman who would be "chained" in Dutch society, an attractive upper-class young woman of marriageable age, would be a sorry sight, a beggar languishing in Leiden, a dead prospect. But when, in addition to gaining portrait commissions in Amsterdam, he won the commission to paint a series of pictures on the Passion for Prince Frederick Hendrick, the young woman he loved, like Martha in the story of Lazarus, could hardly believe her eyes. In *The Raising of Lazarus* (Br. 538) Rembrandt illustrated the climax of the story. On a panel fashioned from one large plank cut from the center of an oak, Rembrandt painted the moment when Lazarus comes forth. Martha leans forward in amazement. The man she had given up for dead lives again.

Rembrandt chose another plank of heartwood from the same oak that he used for the *Lazarus* to cut a similar-sized panel for *The Abduction of Proserpine* (Br. 463), an illustration of Ovid's story of Pluto, god of the underworld, who sees Proserpine eagerly gathering flowers and carries her off in his chariot to become his queen. Noting the common physical properties of their supports, the Rembrandt Research Project team go on to describe a number of "other striking correspondences" between the *Lazarus* and the

[27] Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits*, 64.

Abduction, including color scheme, "types and motifs such as the heads of Pluto and Christ and the forward-thrusting heads of the women, " as well from X-rays "that both paintings have features of their sequence in common."[28]

These technical details reveal how related the two paintings were in Rembrandt's imagination. Now revitalized, Rembrandt may have wanted to grasp his beloved and carry her off into the darkness despite her reluctance. He painted Proserpine bent backwards trying to scratch Pluto's face and push him away while Diana and Minerva cling desperately to her cape trying to rescue her. Pluto, turning his face away from Proserpine's scratching hands and holding her powerfully in his arms, determinedly drives his lion chariot into the enveloping darkness of his kingdom.

But in actuality Rembrandt's passionate desire led him to create what Jacob Rosenberg describes as "a powerful Baroque dramatization of the subject, with a miniaturist's refinement of execution."[29] He transmuted his primitive feelings into a work both vivid and delicate. Instead of abducting his beloved, Rembrandt illustrated a familar myth that his apprentices could watch him develop and that he could then sell. The *Proserpine*'s combination of sexually-charged subject-matter with delicate brushwork suggests that Rembrandt's behavior toward his beloved was exemplary. Furthermore, since Rembrandt chose this subject from among the great stock of mythological subjects used by artists again and again, no personal connection with the artist would occur to his viewers to distract them from this fine illustration of Ovid's well-

[28]Bruyn et al, *Corpus*, vol. 1, 368.

[29]Rosenberg, *Rembrandt*, 271.

known story. In fact Prince Frederick Hendrick purchased this work for his collection, where it hung "in the large audience chamber, next to the cloak room of His Excellency," according to a 1632 inventory.[30] Again, as with his *Christ on the Cross* (Br. 543A) Rembrandt was able to transform his extreme and socially unacceptable impulses into a work of art sold to the highest ranking person in the Netherlands.

Rembrandt expressed the sexual intensity of the *Abduction* more openly in several etchings of this same year, 1631. In the etching *Jupiter Approaching a Reclining Antiope* (Ba. 204) Jupiter, disguised as a bull, draws close to a beautiful nude woman lying on a bed with Rembrandt's monogram "RHL" on it. The placement of that monogram certainly indicates a wish that a beautiful nude woman was lying in his bed and that he was in Jupiter's position! Rembrandt again, as he probably did last year for *Diana at the Bath*, hired a model to pose nude for his etching *Naked Woman Seated on a Mound* (Ba. 198). With her slight smile, she seems more inviting than last year's *Diana.*

Then Rembrandt began to come closer to the woman for whom he had been yearning since he first started working on his Andromeda. He was evidently able to persuade her to model for a painting of *Minerva* (Br. 466), the Roman goddess at whose temple artists worship. In the painting process Rembrandt may have recorded for himself his change in attitude toward women. An X-ray of the painting shows that he painted Minerva over an earlier picture that is reminiscent of the story of Delilah, the destroyer of the

[30] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 87, 1632 / 3.

powerful Samson.[31]

Rembrandt's model for Minerva was probably Saskia van Uylenburgh, younger cousin of Hendrick van Uylenburgh, the art dealer who owed Rembrandt 1000 guilders.[32] Rembrandt, a Hollander miller's son, was drawn to an aristocratic young woman from an exclusive province.

Saskia was from one of the first families of Friesland. She was the youngest daughter of Rombertus van Uylenburgh, who, after becoming a doctor of jurisprudence, held a number of important official positions in Friesland. He was appointed burgomaster of Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland, and then a deputy of the State of Friesland and councillor to the Court of Friesland.[33]

Saskia early became an orphan; her mother died when she was seven, her father when she was twelve. Her court appointed guardian was the husband of one of her older sisters, an advocate at the Court of Friesland and secretary of Het Bildt township.[34] Rembrandt probably painted this portrait when Saskia was visiting for the day at her cousin Hendrick's house. She lived, however, with her cousin Aaltje van Uylenburgh and her cousin-in-law, Cornelis Sylvius, a Calvinist minister who acted as her guardian in Amsterdam. Thinking back to *Andromeda* we can see why Rembrandt might have thought of Saskia as being chained. Certainly a young aristocratic woman with a Calvinist minister as her local guardian no doubt would be very carefully chaperoned and guarded.

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[31] Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, vol. 1, 354. The Rembrandt Research Project team, however, do not mention what the underpainting might symbolize.

[32] Strauss, *Rembrandt Documents*, 75, 1631 / 4.

[33] Ibid., 47, 1612 / 1.

[34] Ibid., 47, 1612 /1.

That Rembrandt fell in love with a Frisian girl, as well as an aristocrat, is of special interest. Friesland is an exceptional province of the Netherlands with its own language and strong identity. At the time of the founding of the United Provinces, Friesland obtained the concession of maintaining a separate Court in Leeuwarden and a Prince of Friesland, while the Court and Prince at the Hague represented all the other provinces.

Rembrandt was next able to persuade Saskia to pose for a full length portrait often titled "*Rembrandt's Sister*", but which will be titled here *Portrait of Saskia* (Br. 83), now known only from reproductions. All dressed up, she stands boldly with her hand on a cane, looking regally out at us, her pearl earring dangling.

Rembrandt also painted a full-length *Self-Portrait* (Br. 16) which may well be a pendant to *Portrait of Saskia*. This artisan from Leiden portrayed himself with as regal a demeanor and as elegant a costume as the young woman whose well-to-do father had been a member of the Court of Friesland.

Rembrandt's bland expression betrays none of Pluto's burning ardor. Dressed like a prince of some Middle Eastern kingdom, his pose is that of the black king in Ruben's *Adoration of the Magi*. What had been a hidden assertion in his *Self-Portrait* (Br. 12) for King Charles I, the vision of being a king in his own realm, now emerges.[35] Somewhat later he adds in the foreground a subdued dog with shaved hindquarters who patiently waits with bowed head. [36] This alter ego expresses Rembrandt's willingness to wait for his vision to become reality.

[35] Schwartz, *Rembrandt*, 61.

[36] Bruyn et al., *Corpus*, 1, 368.

Rembrandt often used dogs to express his feelings. The puppy bounding around and barking in the *David Presenting the Head of Goliath to Saul* proclaims the exuberance of his growing mastery of painting. Now his canine counterpart has matured. This dog, so well-behaved that he does not really need a leash, is a well-bred poodle, clipped to make him more attractive. Rembrandt himself has a small moustache in this painting. Julius Held, who has noted Rembrandt's fondness for including a dog in his pictures, concludes that the dog's characterization "is always in accord with the activities of the human beings with whom he is associated."[37] In this portrait, neither the dog nor Rembrandt shows any primitive urges. His feelings are as under wraps as his body. It is unlikely that he told Saskia that he had painted a pendant to her full-length portrait. For the time being they were a royal couple only in his imagination.

As the sacred counterpart to his *Abduction of Proserpine*, he painted *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* (Br. 543) with the same careful detailed touch of a miniaturist and signed it RHL1631. This *Presentation* takes place in an immense cathedral filled with onlookers. Mary, who recalls Saskia as Minerva, occupies a central position. And hidden in the shadow between Joseph's knee and Mary's dress is a dove, a detail from the biblical story, hinting of love, which Rembrandt had not included previously in picturing a *Presentation*. In contrast to Pluto who forcibly takes his woman, Joseph is a humble, nurturing man who did not physically father his son, yet the same inner vitality animates both of these exquisitely

[37] Julius S. Held, *Rembrandt and the Book of Tobit*, (Northhampton: Gehenne Press, 1964) 22.

painted pictures.

The Presentation closes *Rembrandt's Pictures and His Life:. The Leiden Years.* This period of his pictures from 1625 through 1631 is of course only the very beginning of Rembrandt's long and productive career. As he continued painting, etching and drawing through his life, he maintained his same basic principle of taking Nature as his only guide and its corollary of utilizing his own deepest and most life-like emotions to enliven his pictures.

CONCLUSION

The original question was this: Why do Rembrandt's pictures move us so deeply? It has taken us far beyond that starting point into the specifics of his creative processes in his early years as an artist.

Rembrandt's Latin school education and Leiden heritage gave him a unique background for a seventeenth-century artist. He was educated to move into a stratum of society other than the one his family, generations of millers, had occupied. He decided in Latin school that he wanted to become a painter and thus accept returning to the artisan class, despite his family's ambitions for him. It was while he was in Latin school too that Rembrandt must have already formed his basic ideas about art, ones that were unorthodox among masters of painting in that period.

Rembrandt, probably influenced by Caravaggio through Karel van Mander's *Het Schilder-Boeck*, considered that Nature should be his only guide. As an outgrowth of this principle he believed that in order to move others through his pictures he should use his own deeply felt emotions as evoked from real-life situations.

The method by which he "used" his own feelings was to find among the great widely known storehouse of biblical stories, historical incidents, and mythological tales a subject that symbolically matched his feelings and the evoking circumstances.

This fundamental aspect of Rembrandt's art was for him only the means to his important end of "proper execution" of a picture.

Yet we in the twentieth century, no longer as responsive to the subjects that Rembrandt illlustrated, still find his pictures moving. We identify with those he pictures and intuitively respond to their feelings, even though many of us do not know the details of the biblical and other stories that he illustrated. Thus, without realizing it, we are probably reacting to the underlying means that Rembrandt employed to make his pictures lively. Since he based his work on his own feelings, it is possible to analyze individual pictures to discover what emotions and life circumstances might have energized them. Applying this approach to the pictures of his Leiden years has proved a fruitful method for gaining glimpses into Rembrandt, the artist and the man.

In this study we began by considering his pictures from his first seven years from the point of view of what emotions and events of Rembrandt's life they might utilize, using the context of his heritage and early years.

One striking finding from the pictures of this first period of his career was Rembrandt's already highly developed identity and belief in himself as an artist. This consciousness of himself as an artist is consistent with his insistence on a career as an artist while he was in Latin school. Instead of his early years being spent as an apprentice to a master of painting, Rembrandt probably began his apprenticeship after he matriculated at Leiden University, when he was almost fourteen.

Rembrandt symbolized his feelings about being an artist through the subjects and picture elements that he stressed, the way he signed his paintings, and in some cases in the figures in the

underpainting as well.

Another early theme concerned living at home, where soon, however, his needs as an artist began to conflict with being a family member. After he took a studio of his own, his pictures reflected this new life. The theme of his role as an artist, however, also continued until he was a master with his own apprentice. Yet even in later pictures of this first stage of his career indications of his belief in his special place in art history continue to appear intermittently within his work.

As his life changed so did his themes. Thus, a series of pictures concern the last period of his father's life and his reactions to his death. In the last two years before he obtained commissions in Amsterdam, he was particularly attracted to drawing and etching beggars. Once he began to gain commissions for portraits, however, he etched a self-portrait where his outfit became increasing grand through nine states, and painted three small pictures on a hidden gold ground. Clearly he welcomed financial success.

His first commissions for portraits show an immediate mastery of this speciality of painting. Love was another new subject that began during the period of his starting to work in Amsterdam. The move from Leiden to Amsterdam at the end of the period covered in this study thus heralds new beginnings.

Another aspect of Rembrandt's picture-making that emerged from this study was the interactive relationship he developed with his pictures both in the process of making them and after they were finished. X-rays of some of his paintings have added a new

dimension to this dialogue that Rembrandt had with his work. Each of his pictures seems to have carried visual reminders to him of his preoccupations at a particular time. By looking at a picture after it was finished, he could then say in effect: "Yes, that's how I felt, but now...." In other words he re-created his original emotion in his work, then recognized it in the finished painting. The picture-making process itself in connection with life events thus seems to have given him new ideas for pictures. This process seems also to have provided him with a means for moving beyond the emotions--sometimes very negative ones--that initiated his pictures.

The results of analyzing his use of his emotions in his work of the first seven years of his long productive career have yielded interesting details about his life and about his method of gaining inspiration and creating works of art. It is planned that through further research the same method will be applied to the many works of his mature and later years.

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